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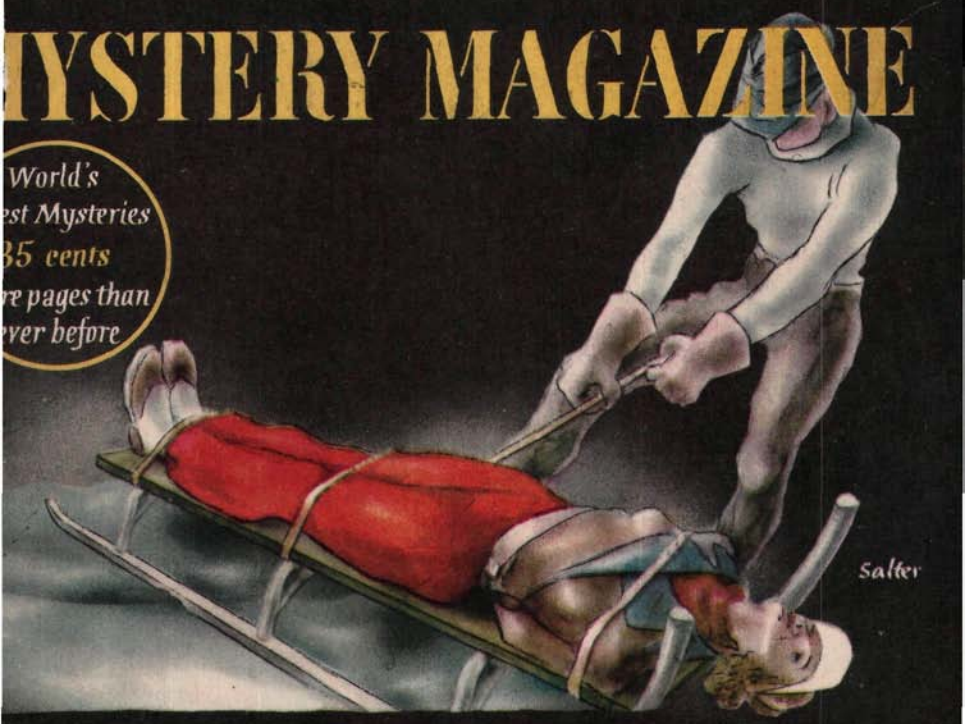

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Number 52

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Vol. 11, No. 52, MARCH 1948. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U. S. and possessions, Canada, and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.* *Copyright, 1948, by The American Mercury, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved by the publishers in the U. S., Great Britain, Australia, Mexico, and all other countries participating in the International Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention.* *Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879.*

Published also in a Talking-Record Edition by The American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky. Manufactured in the United States of America.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

MILDRED FALK, *Managing Editor* JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *Business Manager*
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An open letter to readers of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Dear Reader:

For many months we have fought to maintain the original 25¢ price for Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Now it is no longer possible to do so and the price is being changed beginning with this issue to 35¢ a copy, $4.00 a year.

You may be interested to know what has been happening to publication costs: our paper has gone up 78%, our composition, printing, binding, and handling costs have gone up 84%, and various incidental costs have risen as much and more since 1941, when EQMM was first launched at 25¢ a copy. Until this issue we have absorbed all increases, but it is now no longer possible for us to do so.

In this issue we are giving you an extra sixteen pages — more than 8000 additional words. This permits us to bring you an Erle Stanley Gardner novelette complete in this issue, together with 10 other stories — 11 stories in all! — including some of the best work of Mary Roberts Rinehart, Craig Rice, Brett Halliday, Roy Vickers, Michael Arlen and Stuart Palmer. Next month we will publish the story which won the $3,000 First Prize in the 1947 EQMM Contest. In addition, there will be 10 other stories by such writers as Eric Ambler, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Francis Coe, T. S. Stribling, Octavus Roy Cohen and Percival Wilde.

We can assure you that Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine will continue to give you the finest selection of crime and detective stories available in any one magazine, anywhere in the world.

Lawrence E. Spivak, PUBLISHER

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THE STATISTICAL MAN

Erle Stanley Gardner, creator of Perry Mason, has been called "the king of the mystery field." In some ways this is a rather doubtful honor — the crown has been worn by too many pretenders. Back in the 1890–1910 era such writers as James M'Govan, Dick Donovan, and William LeQueux were regularly hailed in print as "the kings of the mystery field" — and who remembers them now? In later years Edgar Wallace and E. Phillips Oppenheim succeeded to the throne. But if Erle Stanley Gardner is the current King, who is the Ace? We know the identity of the Queen . . . Alva Johnston, in his authorized biography of Gardner, placed an even more spectacular title on Erle's brow: Mr. Johnston came right out and said flat-footedly that Erle Stanley Gardner is "the people's choice for America's greatest living writer," and he supported this claim with a pyrotechnical display of statistics. In 1943 the Gardner books ran up a total sales of 4,547,922 copies; in the following year, 1944, Gardner collected royalties on 4,903,685 copies; in 1945 Gardner climbed to the astronomical sales figure of 6,104,000 copies.

Through the courtesy of Mr. Thayer Hobson we can supplement these statistics. In 1946 Gardner sold only 5,378,337 copies of his books. Which raises the question: Is Gardner slipping? (Other writers should slip so badly!) Since his first novel, THE CASE OF THE VELVET CLAWS, *published in 1933, Gardner sales in the United States and Canada have passed the 28,000,000 mark. King, indeed!*

Gardner's biggest individual seller is THE CASE OF THE LUCKY LEGS, *first published in 1934: this book alone boasts a sale in excess of 2,000,000 copies. According to Alice Payne Hackett, in her* FIFTY YEARS OF BEST SELLERS, *1895–1945, the two-million sales figure has yet to be reached by such outstanding best-sellers as* THE GIRL OF THE LIMBERLOST, THE TRAIL OF THE LONESOME PINE, THE SHEIK, REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM, FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS AND HOW THEY GREW, POLLYANNA, THE SPECIALIST, ANNE OF GREEN GABLES, TARZAN OF THE APES, *Emily Post's* ETIQUETTE, DERE MABLE, MRS. WIGGS OF THE CABBAGE PATCH, LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY, *and* THE CHINESE ORANGE MYSTERY.

Are you tired of statistics? No? Then suppose we give you more facts about the amazing Mr. Gardner. The great man's first story was a pulp-magazine novelette called "The Shrieking Skeleton;" it was written in 1923 when Gardner was a 34-year-old lawyer in Ventura, California. Mr.

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Johnston described Gardner the attorney as "a master of logic, a born cross-examiner and a magician at the technical witchcraft of the law." Gardner now lives on his 400-acre Rancho del Paisano, near Temecula in Southern California. He spends his time in comparative leisure, dictating only five or six novels and a few score radio scripts each year.

It takes no less than three high-powered, super-efficient secretaries to handle Gardner's prodigious output, and his enthusiasm for writing detective fiction must be highly contagious; one of his secretaries, Mildred Stiles of Fall Brook, California, submitted a manuscript to EQMM's Third Annual Detective Story Contest. Gardner frequently rises at four a.m. and dictates ten thousand words before breakfast. We remember that Jack London, who was considered a prolific writer, used to average one thousand words per day — why, Gardner has made London look like a veritable tortoise! Of course, the race is not always to the swift . . .

Gardner dictated his first Perry Mason novel in exactly three and one-half days — and at that time, in 1932, Gardner was still devoting part of each day to his legal practice. Naturally, no writer could be expected to keep up this pace — not even Gardner. Before long, Mr. Johnston informs us, it was taking Gardner a whole week to write a full-length novel, and now Gardner spends as much as a month on a single book.

But you can read the complete flabbergasting, razzle-dazzle story for yourself if you "beg, borrow, or steal" a copy of THE CASE OF ERLE STANLEY GARDNER, *by Alva Johnston, published in 1947 by William Morrow & Company, New York, first edition in beige cloth, thin 12mo, the entire volume consisting of 87 pages of which 8 are half-title, title page, and other front matter, and 16 are black-and-white photographs, and 9 are a listing of Gardner's books — all for $1.50 in coin of the realm — an unprecedented book value — hurry, hurry — the life story of the man whom Alva Johnston called a "prose industrialist," the "Henry Ford of detective mysteries."*

DEATH RIDES A BOXCAR

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

WHEN the leg gave its first warning twinge, I stood still for a while and let the rest of the crowd stream on past, up the sloping passenger exit of the big Los Angeles terminal, up to the place where friends and relatives, wives and sweethearts waited in a roped-off space.

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It was going to be a job, remembering to favor that leg, but anything was better than hanging around the insipid routine of the hospital.

"Gabby" Hilman was coming in by bus. He was to meet me at the Palm-Court Hotel somewhere around ten o'clock. Until then I was just killing time. I could have started a little celebration over my release from the hospital, but I didn't want to do it without Gabby. He'd been my buddy, and I wanted to start even with him.

There was no such thing as getting a cab to yourself these days. They piled them in two, three, and four at a time. A starter grabbed the light bag I was carrying. "Where to?" he asked.

"Palm-Court Hotel."

"Get in."

He held the door open, and then was when I saw the class waiting in the cab.

She moved over as I got in. For a moment her eyes rested on mine — large, dark eyes that were built to register expression.

I was careful about getting into the cab. "Sorry if I'm a little awkward," I apologized. "I'm nursing a knee back to life."

She smiled a cordial enough smile, but she didn't say anything.

The cab starter said abruptly, "Where to, sir?" and a man's voice answered, "The corner of Sixth and Figueroa Street."

The cab starter said, "Hop in."

A woman came through the door first, an elderly, white-haired woman with a beaming, cheerful face and kindly gray eyes that blinked at me through silver-rimmed spectacles. The man with her looked to be somewhere around seventy, so I pulled down the jump seat and moved over. It was rather a slow process, because I didn't want to throw the leg out, and I thought the girl on my left watched me with just a little more interest than she'd shown before.

The elderly woman moved over to the middle of the seat, the man got in on the right side. The cab door slammed, and we were off.

It was a short run up to Sixth and Figueroa. The man and the woman got off. The girl said to me, "If you're going much farther, you'd better come back to a more comfortable seat."

"Thanks," I told her, and moved back.

Her eyes were solicitous as she watched the way I moved my leg. "Hurt?" she asked.

"It's just a habit," I told her. "It will take me some time to get accustomed to throwing the leg around."

She didn't say anything more for a while, and not knowing just how far she was going, I decided I'd have to work fast. I took a notebook from my pocket, pulled out a pencil, said, "I'm an investigator gathering statistics for a Gallup poll. These are questions we have to ask in the line of duty. Have you purchased war bonds? — Not the amount; just yes or no."

She looked at me with a peculiar, half-quizzical expression, and said

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shortly, "Yes."

"Question number two," I went blithely on. "Do you feel sympathetic toward the personnel in the armed forces?"

"Of course."

"Question number three. Recognizing the fact that members of the armed forces whom you may encounter are frequently far from home, inclined to be lonely, and with no personal contacts, do you feel it is not only all right, but commendable, to let them make your acquaintance and perhaps, under favorable circumstances, act as your escort for an evening?"

I looked up at her expectantly, holding the pencil poised over the page.

There was just a twinkle in the dark eyes. "You're asking this question impersonally, of course?"

"Oh, *certainly*."

"Only as an investigator?"

"That's right."

"Collecting statistics?"

"Correct."

"Therefore, I presume you ask these questions of every woman you encounter who is over eighteen and under thirty?"

She had me there. I saw a bit of triumph in her eyes. "That's not exactly correct," I said.

"Why not?"

"Over *sixteen* and under eighty," I told her, without smiling. "My employers want the field thoroughly covered."

She laughed, and just then the cab made a little lurch as it swung in to the curb over on the left side of the street. "I'm sorry, soldier; here's where I get off."

"Question number four," I said, hurrying the pencil down the page, "correct name, address, and telephone number."

She just laughed. The cab driver came around and opened the door for her.

"Good night," she said.

I closed the notebook and slipped it back in my pocket. Gabby could probably have done better. He's a whiz at pulling a line out of thin air and getting by with it.

She flashed me a smile. I raised my hat.

In a few minutes we pulled up in front of the Palm-Court. I paid the driver and started easing my weight out of the cab.

My hand, resting on the seat cushion, felt something move. I looked at it. It was a woman's black leather purse. Returning that purse might give me a chance to begin all over again — starting where I had left off.

I should have said to the cab driver, "That woman left her purse," but there's no use insulting Fortune when she gives a fellow an opportunity like that. I simply slid the purse under my coat and held it there with my elbow.

"Leg bothering you?" the cab driver asked.

"A little stiff, that's all."

The first thing I saw when I opened the purse in my hotel room was a long, thin strip of paper about 12 inches

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long, an inch and a half wide, and covered with a string of figures written with a soft pencil. First was the figure 6, four straight lines were just below it; then the figure 23, four lines, and a tally; then 10 and three lines below that — and so on down the entire strip of paper. On the other side a message had been written in the same soft pencil: "Puzzle No. 2 a little after midnight."

That meant nothing to me, so I placed the strip of paper on the bed and turned so the light would shine down into the purse.

There was a wad of greenbacks in there that would have stuffed a sofa cushion.

I felt my heart start pounding as I pulled them out and dumped them on the bed. They were in twenties, fifties, and hundreds, with a small sprinkling of tens and fives.

I started counting. It added up to $7,523 in currency, with a coin purse containing $1.68 in small change.

Then a disquieting thought struck me. The girl who had been in the taxi cab had paid her fare when she got to the sidewalk. I distinctly remembered seeing her hand the cab driver the fare. And I was almost certain she was holding an open purse in her hand as she did so — come to think of it, I was certain. This, then, must be the purse that belonged to the white-haired woman who had got off at Sixth and Figueroa.

I started digging down into the lower regions of the purse.

I found a small leather key container which held four keys, then I took out a lipstick, a compact, four or five cleansing tissues, a small address book of red leather with a loop in front which held a little pencil, and an opened envelope which evidently contained a letter. The envelope was addressed to Muriel Comley, Redderstone Apartments, Los Angeles.

Then I reached for the telephone book.

The voice that answered the telephone sounded very much like that of the girl in the taxicab.

"Is this Muriel Comley?"

An interval — just long enough to be noticeable. Then the smoothly modulated voice saying, "Who is this speaking, please?"

"Before I answer," I said, "I'd like to ask you a question. Did you lose something tonight? — Something within the last hour?"

I felt her voice freeze up. "I'm sorry, if you can't give me your name, I . . . Oh, you mean you've found the purse? . . . Oh!" That last exclamation was filled with sudden dismay. "Will you hold the phone a moment?"

She had gone, leaving me on the singing wire, waiting.

After a while I began to think it was just some sort of a run-around. I could tell she hadn't hung up, but it seemed to be all of two or three minutes since she'd left the phone. Then she was back.

"Yes. I lost my purse. Do you have it?"

Her voice sounded different from

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what it had before — as though her throat had gone dry. I could imagine how she'd feel when she realized she'd lost a wad of dough like that. "I have it," I said, "and it's all safe — everything that's in it."

She asked, "Is this, by any chance, the man who is collecting information for the Gallup poll on how women feel toward servicemen?"

"None other."

"I'm so relieved. If you'll just send —"

"I'll deliver it in exactly twelve minutes and thirty seconds," I interpolated, and hung up before she could argue the point. . . .

I found the name Muriel Comley on the list of names to the right of the apartment-house entrance without any difficulty. She was in Apartment 218.

I pressed the bell, and almost immediately the buzzer announced that the door was being unlatched.

I pushed through the door and into the lobby. It wasn't the sort of apartment house in which one would have expected to find a tenant who carried a small fortune in cash around in her purse. Just a typical, medium-priced place.

I went up to the second floor, found 218, and pressed my finger against the door button.

The girl opened the door, smiling at me with her lips. Her eyes were wide and dark. When she turned so they caught the light, I saw she was afraid. There was abject terror in those eyes.

Her lips kept smiling. "Won't you come in? I'm sorry I can't offer you a drink, but the apartment seems to be fresh out of drinkables. . . . So you found my purse? It certainly was stupid of me."

I kept the purse under my coat, holding it against my body with my left arm. I said, "I really couldn't believe it was yours."

"Why?"

"I thought you opened a purse when you paid off the cab driver."

She laughed. "Just a coin purse. I happened to have it in my pocket. Do sit down."

I stretched my left leg out in front of me.

"Is it bothering you?" she asked solicitously.

"No. Just habit. . . . Of course, there are certain little formalities. You can describe the purse?"

"Of course. It's black leather with a silver border and mountings. The metal rib at the top has polished silver roses standing out from a dull background."

"And the contents?"

Her face went blank.

I kept waiting.

"You opened it?"

"Certainly. I had to get your name and address."

She said, "Surely, Mr. — I don't believe I have your name."

"Burr — Jayson Burr."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Burr. Surely you don't doubt that it's *my* purse," and she was laughing at me now, actually making me feel uncomfortable.

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"I'm afraid you're going to have to describe the contents."

"Well, let me see. There was my lipstick, my compact, and — Yes, I had left my keys in there."

"Have any trouble getting into the apartment?" I asked casually, and watched her.

She said, without batting an eyelash, "I always keep a duplicate key in my pocket. I've lost my purse before. I'm afraid I'm a bit absent-minded."

"All right. So far we've got lipstick, compact, and keys. What else?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"I'm afraid that's too general an inventory. It would describe the contents of almost any woman's purse."

"Well, let's see," she said archly, as though playing some very interesting game. "Since I'm accused of stealing my own purse — or *am* I accused of stealing it?"

"No accusation," I smiled, "no stealing. Simply for my own protection."

"That's right; you *are* entitled to some protection. Well, let's see. There was my address book in there, and some cleansing tissues, and — and a coin purse."

"Can you tell me how much money?"

"I'm sorry, I simply can't. I always carry an extra coin purse in my pocket. Sort of mad money, you know, and then carry the balance in — Oh, I suppose there's ten or twelve dollars probably, altogether, but I can't be certain at all."

"And was there anything else?" I asked.

She frowned. "Really, Mr. Burr, I can't remember *all* the little details. Surely I've identified the purse well enough. . . . You have it with you?"

I looked her squarely in the eyes and lied like a trooper. "I decided I'd better leave it in the hotel until you'd identified it."

"Why, what a strange way to —" she broke off and looked puzzled, a frown furrowing her forehead.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but, you see, you failed to describe the most important thing that was in the purse."

She was silent for a matter of seconds, then, abruptly, she got to her feet. "Mr. Burr, I've tried to be patient. I've tried to make allowances. But don't you think that, in the first place, you should have returned the purse to the cab driver? In the second place, you should have carried your investigation of the contents of the purse only far enough to have ascertained my name and address. In the third place, I *have* described the purse to you — in the greatest detail."

"The exterior."

"The exterior!" she repeated with icy dignity. "And that should be enough in dealing with a *gentleman*."

I just grinned at her.

She said angrily, "You know I *could* have you arrested for taking that purse."

"Why don't you? Then I'll tell the judge to turn it over to you just as soon as you've described the contents."

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"That wouldn't help *you* any."

I said, "I don't know much law, but I think you'd have to convince a jury that it was *your* purse before you could convict me of stealing it, wouldn't you?"

Suddenly she was sarcastic: "Very well, if *that's* the way you feel about it I would prefer to lose the purse than put up with your insolence."

She swept toward the door and held it open.

That wasn't the way I had planned the interview to go at all. "Look here," I said desperately; "all I want is a reasonable assurance that —"

"Thank you, Mr. Burr," she interrupted. "All I want is my purse. You admit that you came over here without it. Therefore, no matter *what* I may say, you can't deliver my purse to me here and now. Under the circumstances, I see no use in prolonging the discussion. I will say this, that if you don't have that purse in my hands before tomorrow morning, I'll have you arrested."

"You can have your purse just as soon as you —"

"I don't care to discuss it any more."

She was watching me as I stood holding my left arm against my side. She must have realized that the purse was under my double-breasted coat, but she said nothing about it. "Good night, Mr. Burr!"

I walked out of the door and said, "Good night," without looking back. I heard the vicious slam of the door.

I was halfway to the elevator before I was aware she was following me.

The elevator was waiting there at the second floor. I pulled the door open and stepped to one side for her to get in.

She walked in ahead of me, chin up, eyes cold. I got in, closed the door, and pushed the button for the ground floor.

Neither one of us said anything.

The cage rattled to a stop. I opened the door, waited for her to get out. She was careful not to touch me as she walked past. Then, as I followed, a man was standing at the horseshoe desk back of the sign marked "MANAGER." He was a narrow-shouldered chap with thick-lensed spectacles which gave his face a look of studious abstraction. He blinked owlishly in my general direction, and then lowered his eyes to a daybook in which he was making some entries.

The girl cleared her throat loudly, said, "Pardon me."

The man at the desk looked up.

When she was sure his eye was on her, she grabbed for my left arm, which was holding the purse firmly against my body on the inside of my coat.

I was ready for her, and lowered my shoulder.

Her body struck against the shoulder and glanced off. Her hands clawed at my coat.

The clerk at the desk said, in mildly bewildered reproof, "Come, come, we can't have —"

The girl hung on to me. "Will you *please* call the police! This man

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has stolen my purse!"

The clerk blinked.

I smiled inclusively at him and said, "I've found *a* purse. She *says* it's hers, but she can't identify it."

She said to the clerk indignantly, "I've described it in detail. Please do as I say. Please call the police!"

The clerk looked at me, then looked at her rather dubiously. "You're with Mrs. Comley?" he asked. "Aren't you the lady who just moved in?"

That question did it. She was licked the minute he asked her that question.

The clerk seemed surprised by her sudden surrender. "Oh, all *right*," she stormed. "If that's the sort of place this is. If you want to let him get away with my purse, that's all there is to it! Take the purse if you think it will do you any good." She flounced toward the elevator.

I raised my hat. "Good evening," I said, and walked out.

I was dozing in the hotel lobby and didn't see Gabby when he came in. The first I knew, I woke up with a start, and there he was standing over me looking down at me with that good-natured grin of his.

"Hi, soldier," he said.

I came up out of the chair, forgetting everything the doc had told me about the leg. Gabby thumped me on the shoulder, and I made a quick pass at his chin. Then we shook hands.

We went up to the room. Gabby splashed around in the bathtub and I told him all about the purse.

"Where you got this purse now?" Gabby asked.

"I did it up in a bundle and told the hotel clerk the package contained important military documents, to put it in a safe, and to be darn' certain no one else got it."

Gabby, pulling on clean clothes out of his bag, thought things over while he got dressed. "This jane is class?" he asked.

"With a capital C."

"Why wouldn't she tell you what was in the bag?"

"She didn't know. She isn't Muriel Comley."

"Then what was she doing in Muriel Comley's apartment?"

"I don't know. Seemed like she was visiting, from what the clerk said."

"Seems like we'd ought to do something about this," Gabby said, and winked.

"That's the way I felt."

"Maybe Muriel's good-looking," Gabby suggested.

"Could be."

"What," Gabby asked, "are we waiting for?"

"You."

Gabby grinned, adjusted his tie, struggled into his coat, and said, "Let's go."

I rang the bell of 218 and we stood there waiting, tingling with that feeling of excitement which comes from doing something interesting and not being quite certain what is going to happen next. After a few seconds I

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pressed the button again. When there was still no answer, I said to Gabby, "Perhaps she's been expecting this and decided nothing doing."

"Perhaps she's gone to bed."

I said, "Oh, well then, we wouldn't want to get her up. Oh, no! We'll go right on back to the hotel."

Gabby laughed.

I moved over to the front door, pressed my face against the glass, looked inside, holding my hands up at the side of my face to shut out the reflection of the street lights. There was no one at the desk. The lobby looked deserted.

"Anything doing?" Gabby asked.

"No. Evidently the clerk's gone to bed and this outer door is kept locked at night."

I pressed a couple of other buttons. On my second try the buzzer on the door whirred into belated sound, and Gabby, pushing against the door, stumbled on into the corridor as the door opened. We walked up the one flight of stairs.

Just as I raised my hand to knock on the door of 218, Gabby caught my wrist. Then I saw that the door lacked about a sixteenth of an inch of being closed. The apartment was dark behind it, and from where I was standing, the door looked to be securely closed. Standing over at Gabby's angle, you could see it wasn't.

We stood there for a second or two in silence, looking at the door. Then Gabby pushed the door open.

I went on in. We found the light switch, snapped on the lights, and Gabby heeled the door shut behind us.

The apartment was just as I had last seen it. Nothing seemed to have been touched or moved.

Gabby tried a door which, it seemed, led to a kitchenette. While Gabby was prowling around in there, I opened the other door.

"Gabby!" I yelled.

Gabby's heels pounded the floor, and his fingers dug into my shoulder as we stood looking at what lay there on the bed.

The body lay sprawled in that peculiarly awkward posture which is the sign of death. By the weird, unreal light cast by a violet globe in the bed lamp I could see his features. I had the feeling I'd seen him before, and recently, too. Then I remembered. "It's the clerk at the desk downstairs," I said.

Gabby gave a low whistle, moved around the end of the bed, paused, looking down at the floor.

"Don't touch it," I warned as I saw him bend over. I moved around and joined him, looking down at the thing on the floor lying near the side of the bed.

It was a club some two feet long, square at one end, round at the other, and covered with sinister stains which showed black in the violet light. There were three rings cut in the billet, up near the round end, and, between these rings, were crosses; first a cross like a sign of addition, then a conventional cross with the horizontal arm two thirds of the way up the per-

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pendicular line, then another cross of addition.

We searched the rest of the place. No one was there.

"I think," I said, "someone's putting in too many chips for us to sit in the game."

"Looks like it to me," Gabby admitted.

We left the door slightly ajar, just as we had found it. We couldn't be bothered with the elevator, but went tiptoeing down the corridor at a constantly accelerating rate and down the stairs. I wanted to get out of the place.

Suddenly down at the far end of the corridor a dog barked twice. Those two short, sharp barks made me jump half out of my clothes and sent a chill up my spine. Gabby moved right along. I doubt if he noticed them.

We didn't say anything more all the way to the hotel. The lobby was deserted. We had the keys in our pockets. We went up to the room. Gabby sat down in the big chair by the window and lit a cigarette. I pulled up my bag and started scooping up the stuff on the bed and cramming it in. When I had my clean clothes packed, I spread out my soiled shirt so I could wrap clothes in it for the laundry. A slip of paper fluttered to the floor.

"What's that?" Gabby asked.

I picked it up. "That's the piece of paper that was in the purse. I put stuff from the purse out on the bed, and I'd also dumped my bag —"

"Let's see it."

I handed it over.

Gabby frowned. " 'Puzzle No. 2 a little after midnight.' That mean anything, Jay?"

"Not to me."

Gabby's eyes were cold and hard. "Never heard of a switch list — or a puzzle switch?"

"No." I knew then, just from the way Gabby was looking at me, that we were in for something.

"You see, Jay, there's just a chance this is a trap we're being invited to walk into."

"Sort of a will you walk into my parlor asked the spider of the fly?" I inquired inanely.

"Exactly."

"So what do we do?"

Gabby's lips were a thin line. "We walk in. Come on, Jay. We're going to the freight yards. I have to see a man down there anyway, and this is as good a time as any."

We got across the yards in a series of jerks and dashes to a big wooden building. Gabby led me up a flight of stairs, down a long corridor lined with offices, and pushed open a door.

A man who had been writing down figures on the page of a book glanced up. An expression of annoyance gave way to astonishment. Then the swivel chair went swirling back on its casters as he jumped to his feet.

"You old sun of a gun!" the man exclaimed.

Gabby gave that slow grin of his, said, "Fred, this is Jay Burr," and to me, jerking his head toward the man in the green eyeshade, "Fred Sanmore."

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Just then a train came rumbling on through and it sounded as though the building was within a half-mile or so of a heavy bombardment. Everything shook and trembled. The roar of sound filled the room so there was no chance to talk. We simply sat there and waited.

When the train had passed, Sanmore went over back of the desk, took off his eyeshade, and said to Gabby, "You so and so, you want something."

"How did you know?" Gabby asked.

"Because I know you. You're here on furlough. This is your first night in town. You've been here for a couple of hours. By this time you'd be buying drinks for a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead if you didn't want something. What is it?"

For a moment he and Gabby looked at each other.

Then Gabby pulled the strip of paper out of his pocket. "List of cars going past the puzzle switch?" he asked.

"Probably coming on a switch from over the hump," Sanmore said.

"What," I asked, "is a hump?"

Sanmore started to answer me, then turned to Gabby instead: "Why the commotion?"

Gabby grinned. "I'll bite."

"Why do you want to know, Gabby?"

"Just checking up."

Sanmore sighed and turned back to me: "Sorry, Burr; a hump is the high point on a two-way incline. You push cars up to the hump, then cut 'em loose, and gravity takes 'em down across the yards. It saves a lot of wear and tear, a lot of steam, releases a lot of rolling stock, and handles a cut a lot faster than you can any other way."

"And a cut?" I asked.

He grinned. "Any number of freight cars taken from a train and switched around yards. Even if it's a whole train. The minute a switch engine gets ahold of it, it's a cut."

Gabby said, "Any idea whose figures these are?"

Sanmore shook his head. "We might be able to find out."

"You're certain that's what this list is?" I asked.

"Positive."

"Would it be too much to ask just what makes you certain?"

He said, "Well, in the first place, notice the numbers. There aren't any of them higher than ninety-seven. We have ninety-seven numbers on our terminal card index. Whenever a train comes in, a switch list is made up, and numbers are put on the cars for the different destinations.

"For instance, here's number one, and underneath it are three lines. That means there are three cars in a row for T N O Manifest. Then here's two lines under number eleven. That means two cars in a row for Indio. Then there are two lines under the figure four, which means two successive cars for the El Paso Manifest.

"Now then, loosen up and tell me what brings you two goofs in here at this hour of the night to ask questions about railroading."

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Gabby said awkwardly, "Just got curious, that was all. Jay thought it might be a code."

Sanmore kept looking at Gabby.

Gabby reached for the strip of paper.

Sanmore started to hand it to him, then idly turned it over.

Gabby grabbed for it.

Sanmore jerked his hand back, read the message on the back: "Puzzle No. 2 a little after midnight." I saw his eyebrows get level.

Gabby didn't say anything.

Sanmore slid down off the corner of the desk. "Come on, you birds."

He led the way down the stairs, out through a door, and up along the tracks bearing off to the left.

"This is a bit tricky," Sanmore said, as the tracks began to converge. "Watch your step along here." Abruptly he reached out, grabbed our arms. "Hold it!"

I couldn't see what had stopped us, when all at once a great bulk loomed out of the night. It was so close and seemed so ominously massive I wanted to jump back, but Sanmore's grip held me. And I realized then that another big shape was moving along just behind me.

"Putting cars over the hump," Sanmore explained.

As the car passed I could hear the sound of its wheels rumbling along over the steel rails. But its approach had been as quiet as though I had been in the jungle and some huge elephant had come padding softly up behind me.

"All right," Sanmore said.

We moved forward cautiously. My eyes were now alert, and I saw the next car while it was some twenty yards away.

"This is dangerous," Sanmore said. "You get one of those big boxcars rolling along by gravity, and it's like a fifty-ton steel ball moving slowly along an incline. You can't stop 'em; you can't turn 'em. They don't have any whistle or any bell. They don't make very much noise against the background of noise from the yards, particularly when they're coming toward you. . . . Okay; here we are over here, boys. Here's one of the puzzle switches."

A man sat at a complicated switch mechanism, a slip of narrow paper in his hands similar to the one I had found in Muriel Comley's purse. A seemingly endless stream of cars was rolling down the tracks that fed into the intricate mechanism of the switch — a remorselessly steady procession which called for carefully co-ordinated thought and action.

Sanmore said, "He's too busy to talk now. Let's go find the hump foreman."

We started moving up the tracks. I paused as I saw a line of men seated by a stretch of track. In front of them was a string of holes, and in many of these holes were thrust billets of hickory, substantial clubs some two feet or more in length, identical, as nearly as I could tell, with the club which we had seen on the floor by the murdered man.

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Sanmore answered my unspoken question. "These are the men who ride the cars down," he said. "The hump is back up here. We put the cars over the hump. The pinmen uncouple the cars in units according to the numbers on them. Then one of these boys — notice that chap on the end now."

Two cars came rumbling down the track. A man swung lazily up out of a chair, picked up one of the hickory clubs, stood, for a moment, by the track, gauging the speed of the oncoming cars, then swung casually up the iron ladder, climbed up to the brake wheel, inserted his billet to give leverage on the wheel, tightened it enough to get the feel of the brakes, and then clung to the car, peering out into the darkness.

The car moved onward, seeming neither to gather speed nor to slow down as it moved. The man at the puzzle switch flipped a little lever. The car rattled across switch frogs, turned to the left, and melted away into the darkness.

A stocky, competent man, who looked hard and seemed to have a deep scorn for anything that wasn't as hard and as tough as he was, came walking down the track.

Sanmore said, "Bob, couple of friends of mine looking the ground over. . . . Whose figures are these?"

The man took one look at the long list of figures on the slip of paper; then he looked at Sanmore, then he looked at Gabby, and finally at me.

"They're *my* figures," he said in a voice that had an edge of truculence. "What about it?"

Silently, Sanmore turned over the slip, showed Cuttering the writing on the back, said nothing.

"Not my writing," he said.

"Know whose it is?"

"No."

"Any idea what this message means?"

"No. Look here; there's a half a dozen of these old lists lying along the tracks. We throw 'em away after a cut has gone over the hump and through the switches. Anyone who wanted to write a message to someone and wanted a piece of paper to write it on could pick up one of these slips."

There was an uneasy silence for half a minute.

"What's so important about this?" Cuttering asked sharply.

"It may be evidence."

"Of what?"

I met the steady hostility of his eyes. "I don't know."

I reached for the strip of paper. "You'll have to make a copy of it," I said. "This one is evidence."

Cuttering looked at me as though I were something he'd combed out of his hair.

Wordlessly, while we watched, he copied off the string of numbers with the lines underneath them. Then, just before he reached the end, he frowned, said, "Wait a minute. . . . We put this through yesterday night about eleven fifteen."

Sanmore didn't waste any more

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time. His voice was packed with the authority of a man giving an order: "Get me everything you have on that, Bob." Then he turned to Gabby: "We'll check those cars through the Jumbo Book, Gabby, if you think it's that important."

Gabby said simply, "I think it's that important. We're at the Palm-Court. You can phone us there."

Gabby said to the cab driver, "Go a little slow in the next block, will you? I want to take a look on the side street."

The driver obligingly slowed. "This the place you want?" he called back.

"Next street," Gabby said, swinging around to look at the Redderstone Apartments.

Then Gabby and I exchanged puzzled looks. The apartments were dark. The street in front showed no activity. There was no unusual congestion of vehicles parked at the curb.

"Okay?" the driver asked as he crawled past the next side street.

"Okay," I said.

We went on to the Palm-Court, paid off the cab driver, stood for a moment on the sidewalk. Neither of us wanted to go in.

"What do you make of it?" Gabby asked in a low voice.

I said, "We've got to tip off the police."

"We'll be in bad if we do it now."

"We've got to do it, Gabby."

"You don't think the police have been notified, cleaned up the place, and gone?"

I didn't even bother to answer.

"Okay," Gabby said. "Let's go."

We went into the lobby, nodded a the clerk on duty, and I walked ove to the telephone booth. Gabby stooc by the door for a moment until motioned him away so I could clos the door tightly.

I dialed Police Headquarters, said "This is the Redderstone Apartments Did you get a call about some trouble up here — about an hour and a half ago?"

"Just a minute," the voice said at the other end of the line. "I'll check with the broadcasting department. . . . What was it about?"

I said, "You'll find it all right — if it's there."

"Okay. Just a minute."

I held onto the line for several seconds while the receiver made little singing noises in my ear. Then the voice said, "No, we haven't anything from the Redderstone Apartments. Why? What's the trouble?"

"Apartment two-eighteen," I said, "has a murdered man. You should have known about it an hour ago," and slammed up the receiver.

Gabby was waiting for me in the lobby. His brows raised in a question.

"They know nothing about it."

"You reported it?"

I nodded.

Gabby and I went over to the desk to get the key.

The clerk took a memo out of the box, along with the key. "Some young woman's been trying to get you. She waited here nearly half an hour."

"A good-looking brunette with

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large dark eyes," I asked, "about twenty-two or twenty-three, good figure?"

"Easy on the eyes," he said somewhat wistfully, "but she isn't a brunette. She's a redhead, blue eyes, dark red hair — guess you'd call it auburn. A quick-stepping little number."

"She didn't leave any name?"

"No name."

"Want to wait?" I asked Gabby.

He said, for the clerk's benefit, "Time was when I'd have waited all night on a hundred-to-one chance that a girl like that would come back, but now I want shut-eye."

"Same here," I told him.

We went up in the elevator, and hadn't much more than unlocked the door of the room when the telephone rang.

I picked up the receiver, and the voice of the clerk, who was evidently taking over the switchboard on the night shift, said, "She's here again. Wants to come up."

"Send her up," I told him, hung up the phone, and said to Gabby, "A redheaded gal is about to cross our paths."

Gabby walked over to the mirror, hitched his tie into position, ran a comb through his wavy hair. "Let's not fire until we see the whites of her eyes. Perhaps she has a friend."

Knuckles tapped with gentle impatience against the panel of the door.

I opened it.

The girl was something to take pictures of and then pin the pictures up on the wall.

"Won't — won't you come in?" I asked.

She walked on in as easily and naturally as though this was where she lived. She took off her gloves, smiled affably up at me, and said, "Which one of you is Mr. Burr?"

I nodded, said, "I have the —"

"Honor," Gabby finished.

We all laughed then and the tension let down. She said casually, "I'm Muriel Comley."

"*You* are!"

The blue eyes widened in surprise. "Why, yes. Why not?"

I said, "You aren't the Muriel Comley I saw earlier."

She looked puzzled for a minute, and then said, "Oh, you must have seen Lorraine."

"Who's Lorraine?"

"Lorraine Dawson."

"Tell me a little more about Lorraine."

"Lorraine was looking for an apartment on a fifty-fifty basis. I had this place on a lease. It was too big for me, and too much rent. Lorraine came in with me about a week ago."

I said, "You might tell me how it happens Lorraine got hold of your purse."

"She didn't get hold of it. I merely left it in the taxi. I got out. Lorraine stayed in."

"And how did you know where to come for your purse?"

"The taxi driver said you had it."

I raised my eyebrows.

"You see," she said, "I called up

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the cab company. The purse hadn't been turned in. They got hold of the cab driver. He said he remembered you had picked something up from the seat of the cab when you got out. He thought it might have been the purse."

"I didn't know you had been in that cab."

She sighed. "Lorraine and I went to the depot," she explained with exaggerated patience. "I got out and went to meet a train. Lorraine was coming on home, and wasn't going to wait. I waited down there at the depot for the train to come in. The person I expected to meet wasn't on it. Then suddenly I realized I didn't have my purse. I thought back, and remembered then that I must have left it in the cab. That was when I called the cab company. Now do I have to explain to you anything more about my private affairs in order to get what belongs to me? After all, Mr. Burr, your own actions are subject to considerable question."

Gabby said, "He's just trying to be sure, that's all."

She turned to him, and her eyes softened into a smile, vivid red lips parted enough to show nice teeth.

I said, "I'm not interested in your private affairs. But, under the circumstances, since you're the second person this evening who has claimed to be Muriel Comley, I'd like some proof."

"Very well," she said, dropped her hand to the pocket of her light coat, and pulled out a transparent envelope which contained a driver's license.

The driver's license was made out to Muriel Comley. The description fit her to a T.

"The purse," she said, "is of black leather with a smooth, glossy finish. The mountings are silver with narrow borders stamped around the edges of the metal, silver curlicues embossed against a dull-finished background. The handles are of braided leather. Is that enough?"

"The contents?"

"You looked inside?"

"Naturally."

She met my eyes. "The purse," she said, "contained something over seven thousand five hundred dollars in cash, in addition to having my lipstick, keys, a small coin purse with about a dollar and a half in change, an embroidered handkerchief, some cleansing tissues, an address book, and a compact."

Gabby sighed. "I guess," he said to me, "she gets the purse."

I hesitated.

"Well!" she demanded.

"All right," I said.

At length, after signing my name on a receipt, being the receiving end of suspicious scrutiny from the clerk, I was given the package with obvious reluctance.

Back in the apartment, I unwrapped the purse, handed it to her, and said, "Please count the money."

She opened the purse, took out the money, spread the bills on the floor, counted them carefully. Then she said, "Thank you, Mr. Burr,"

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snapped the purse shut, and started for the door.

Gabby opened it for her. Her eyes caressed his. "Thank you very much, Mr. Hilman," she said, and was gone.

I stood looking after her. "I don't like it," I said.

"For the love of Mike, Jay! Snap out of it! She owns the purse. You've got her address. You —"

"And there's a murdered man in her apartment."

"Well, what of it? You can see she doesn't know anything about it."

"Don't be too certain," I said.

I was just getting into bed, and Gabby, in his pajamas, was sitting on the edge of the chair, smoking a last-minute cigarette, when knuckles tapped seductively on the door.

Gabby looked at me in startled surprise.

Suddenly I remembered. "She's back after that slip of paper, I bet."

"My gosh!" Gabby said. "You got a robe, Jay?"

"Gosh, no," I told him. "You're decent. Go to the door."

"What do you mean I'm decent?" Gabby demanded, looking down at his pajamas.

The light, intimate tapping on the door was resumed. "Stick your head out if you're so damned modest," I said. "After all, she's been married. She must know what pajamas are. Tell her you're going to get dressed and take her down to a cocktail bar."

"*That's* an idea!" Gabby barefooted across to the door, opened it a scant three inches, cleared his throat, and said, in the very dulcet tone he reserved for particularly good-looking women, "I'm sorry — you see, I was just getting into bed. I —"

The door pushed open as though a steam roller had been on the other end of it. Gabby jumped up in the air, grabbed his left big toe, and started hopping around in agonized circles.

A tall, competent-looking individual in a gray, double-breasted suit, a gray hat to match, a face that was lean and bronzed, pushed his way into the room and slammed the door shut behind him.

Gabby managed to sidetrack the pain of his skinned toe long enough to get belligerent. "Say," he demanded, "who the hell do you think *you* are? Get out of here, and —"

"Now then," the man announced, "what kind of a damn' racket are you two guys pulling?"

Gabby looked across at me.

"And just who are you?" I asked.

"Inspector Fanston. Headquarters. What's the idea?"

"The idea of what?"

"Who was the jane who was just up in the room?"

I said, "I'm not going to lie to you, Inspector. Her mother and I are estranged and she came to beg with me to go home. But I told her nothing doing. I shouldn't have married a woman who was forty-five years older than I was, in the first place, and I should never have had a daughter who was only five years younger. It makes for a terrific strain on the

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family life. Or don't you think so?"

"Do you," he asked, "think this is a gag?"

"Why not? We're free, white, and twenty-one. And if a woman can't pay us a five minute visit in a hotel bedroom without some house dick —"

"Forget it. I'm not a house dick. I'm from Headquarters. I want to know who the woman was, and when you get done making wisecracks, I want to know what the hell the idea was ringing up Headquarters and telling them a murder had been committed at the Redderstone Apartments."

Neither Gabby nor I said anything for a minute.

The inspector grinned, settled down on the edge of the bed, and said: "That makes it different, doesn't it, wise guy?"

"That makes it very much different," I told him. "How — how did you —?"

"Easy," he said. "When the desk sergeant told you he was consulting with the broadcasting system he was tracing the call — pay station here in the hotel. The clerk remembered you going in to telephone, and there's been a cute little number dropping in and picking up packages of military papers. . . . What the hell's the idea? What are you two guys trying to do?"

I cleared my throat. "About the purse," I said.

"Let's talk about the murder first, if you don't mind."

I said, "I — er — thought —"

"Did you, indeed?" he interrupted. "Well, try thinking again. And let's try thinking it out straight this time. I suppose you boys are on the loose for a little night life, and it's okay by me, just so you don't start pulling practical jokes about murders."

"Practical jokes!" I exclaimed. "A man had the back of his head caved in."

"What man?"

"The man in 218 at the Redderstone Apartments."

He said, "Get up and get your clothes on," and nodded to Gabby, "You, too."

We three walked to the Redderstone Apartments and up to the second floor. An officer in uniform was on guard in the living-room of 218. The bedroom was just as we had left it, except now the bed was a spotless expanse of smooth counterpane.

I had been bracing myself for the shock of being called on to identify the body — perhaps being accused of having had something to do with the crime, and wondering just how I could establish an alibi. But the sight of that smooth bed was too much for me. I stood there for a good two or three seconds.

"Any old time," Fanston said.

Gabby and I both started talking at once. Then Gabby quit and let me tell the story. I knew there was only one thing to do. I told it right from the beginning, with the uniformed cop looking at me skeptically and Fanston's eyes drilling tunnels right into my brain."

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"You *sure* this was the apartment?"

"Absolutely."

Inspector Fanston didn't give up. "All right; let's concede that he looked dead — that you thought he was dead. Those things don't just happen, you know."

"It happened this time."

"Wait a minute until you see what I'm getting at. Suppose it was all planned.

"A purse is planted where you'll be certain to find it. There's enough money in it so you'll really start doing something about it. It's a foregone conclusion that you're coming to this apartment — not once, but twice. And the second time you come back you find the outer door open. A man is lying sprawled out on the bed. There's a violet-colored bulb in the lamp over the bed. That would make anyone look dead as a doornail.

"My best guess is that it's either some new racket or a frame-up to get you two guys on a spot because you two guys just happen to be you two guys. If it's a racket, you look old enough to take care of yourselves. If either one of you has any particular military information, or is here on some particular mission. . . . Well, I think that now would be a good time to take the police into your confidence."

He looked at Gabby. "Right, soldier?"

Gabby just looked innocent. Then he took a leather case from his pocket, handed it to the officer. "Keep it to yourself," he said.

The inspector turned his back. I saw slight motion in his shoulders as he opened the leather case. Then he was motionless and silent for a few seconds.

I heard the snap of a catch, and the inspector turned, poker-faced. He handed the leather case back to Gabby.

"Then you don't think there really was anybody?" I asked.

Fanston said, "Hell, no. It was a racket. Now, go home. If you start buzzing these janes in the morning, be careful — that's all." . . .

Gabby snorted. "They're so dumb they think they've fooled us. . . . Do you want to go back to the hotel now, Jay?"

"Hell, no. Let's find out some more about that stick — and what's happening at Puzzle Number Two shortly after midnight."

We found Fred Sanmore still on duty, tired to the point of utter weariness, but still shoving traffic through the yards.

"Look, Fred," Gabby said; "those brake sticks that the men use — does it make any difference which is which?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can any man pick up any stick?"

Sanmore laughed. "Gosh, no. That's a sure way to pick a fight. Each man has his own stick. When a shift comes on duty, they'll bundle up all of the sticks and heave them out as far as they can throw them. The man whose stick goes the farthest puts it in the last hole. He's the last

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one out."

"How do they tell them apart?"

"Oh, various markings."

Gabby said, with what seemed to me just a little too much innocence, "I don't suppose you happen to know who owns the stick that has three rings out near the end with a series of crosses between the rings?"

"No, but I can find out for you."

"If you could do it quietly," Gabby said, "so your inquiries didn't attract too much attention, that might help."

"Come on up," Sanmore said.

We started up toward the place where the men were sitting in front of the line of pegs. There weren't so many of them now. The cut that was going over the hump was getting pretty well down to the last ten or fifteen cars.

Sanmore left us and talked with two or three of the switchmen in a low voice, then was back to say, "As nearly as I can tell, it's a man named Carl Greester. He went off duty at midnight, but he's still around someplace. He has a friend visiting him in the yards!"

"What do you mean, a friend?"

Sanmore grinned. "I mean a *friend*," and holding up his hands in front of him, he made an hourglass-like outline of a woman's figure. "She came down with a pass from headquarters. And she has another woman with her. Greester is having a confab with them."

"You don't know where Greester lives, do you?" I asked.

"Gosh, no. But I can find out."

"Look, Fred," Gabby said suddenly; "could Jay and I ride one of these cars down to its destination, just to see what it's like?"

"Absolutely against the rules," Sanmore told him brusquely. "If I saw you do it, I'd have to jerk you off the car and have you put out of the yards." And then he deliberately turned his back and walked away.

A big freight car came lumbering down the incline. One of the switchmen, moving with lazy co-ordination, picked up his stick and swung aboard the front of the car.

Gabby and I, acting just as though we had received formal permission from the foreman, walked over to the back ladder.

"You first,' Gabby said.

I favored the leg as much as possible, taking it easy up to the top of the car.

"Hang on," Gabby said, as his head came up over the edge of the boxcar. I looked ahead and saw we were right on the puzzle switch, and braced myself, expecting that I would be thrown from one side to the other as the trucks went over the frogs, but the big, loaded car moved along in majestic dignity. There was only a little jar as the wheels underneath us made noise. Then we were gliding out from the well-lighted area into the half darkness, then out to where it was very dark indeed.

We clicked over a couple of other switches, then veered sharply to the right, and were coasting along when I heard a scream coming from almost

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directly beneath the car.

Gabby was where he could look down on the side. Then he was climbing down the ladder. "Come on, Jay!"

I looked back and caught a glimpse of two girls. A man was with them. Evidently he'd put his arms around them and jerked them back out of the way of the car. Now he was holding them, prolonging the moment of rescue as long as possible.

I forgot all about the leg as I came down the iron ladder, but Gabby was running alongside and eased me to the ground on that last jump.

My knee gave me a little twinge just as we passed a couple of boxcars on a track on the left. I dropped back, said, "Go ahead, Gabby. I'll catch up."

Gabby turned solicitously to look at me, and then I saw him stiffen. At what I saw on his face I forgot about the leg, and whirled.

Three men, armed with brake sticks, were right on top of us. A year ago I'd have been frightened into giving ground and making useless motions, but I'd learned a lot since then. The man who was nearest me raised his club. I shot my left straight to the Adam's apple. I saw Gabby pivot sideways to let a blow slide harmlessly past him, grab the man's wrist, give the arm a swift wrench, then heave. The air became filled with arms and legs as the man went flying up through the darkness, to crash against the side of a boxcar, then drop limply to the ground.

The man I had hit was on the ground. He made a wild swing at my shins with the brake stick. Automatically, and without thinking, I tried to jump back out of the way. The injured knee gave way without warning. Then the brake stick cracked against my shin and I went down on my knees. Suddenly I lost balance and fell forward. As I fell, I spread apart the first and second fingers of my right hand and jabbed the fingers toward his eyes. If he wanted to play dirty, I could teach him something about that. I'd specialized in it.

I think I heard a faint swish. Something, perhaps the sixth sense which wild things have and which we develop under the spur of life-and-death conflict, warned me. I jerked my head to one side, but not soon enough and not far enough.

The next thing I remembered, I was in a warm, musty darkness with a sore head and an aching sensation at my wrists. I tried to move my arms, and realized my hands were tied behind my back.

From the stuffy, thick blackness I heard Gabby's voice: "How's it coming, Jay?"

"What," I asked, "happened?"

"The guy from behind," Gabby explained. "The one who was with the two girls. He caught you on the head just as you went down. I smeared his nose all over his face with a straight right, and then the guy behind me hit me just over the kidneys with everything he had."

"What about the girls?"

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Gabby said, "The redhead ran away. I think she's gone for help. The other one just stood there watching. The damn spy."

My head was feeling a little better all the time, although it still ached. I said, "If you ask me, it was the redhead who was the decoy. They wouldn't have let her run away if she hadn't been."

Gabby's silence was an all but contemptuous contradiction.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Inside a boxcar."

"What," I asked, "is it all about?"

Once more Gabby was silent, but this time it was the tight-lipped silence of a man who is carefully guarding a secret.

I tried to roll over so I could take some of the pressure off my wrists. My shoulder hurt and it was hard to keep my balance.

Gabby heard me move. "Take it easy, Jay. I'm getting this knot worked loose, I think."

After what seemed a minute or two, Gabby said triumphantly, "I've got it, Jay. Just a minute now and we'll be loose, and then we'll be out of here."

I heard his feet on the planks, heard him starting toward me . . .

With an ominous rumble, the door slid back along its tracks. The beam of a flashlight stabbed into the darkness.

Gabby flung himself flat on the floor, keeping his ankles crossed, his hands behind his back.

There was a peculiar scuffling sound from the outer darkness, then the sobbing breathing of a woman.

I got my head around to where I could see a little more of what was happening.

Lorraine Dawson was literally lifted and thrown into the car by three men.

The beam of the flashlight swung around and then suddenly stopped. "Do you," demanded a voice, "see what I see?"

I looked along the beam of the flashlight. It was centered on the pieces of rope that Gabby had untied from his wrists and ankles.

The three men were bunched there in the doorway, the beam of the flashlight holding Gabby as a target like a helpless airplane caught in a vortex of searchlights.

Gabby made one swift leap and hit the group feet first.

I heard the thud of his heels striking against flesh. The flashlight was jerked up, looped-the-loop, hit the side of the boxcar, hesitated a moment at the edge of the door, then fell to the tracks. The sounds of bodies threshing around in a struggle, the thud of blows filled the night. All of a sudden there was a lull, then shouts and curses as our assailants piled out of the boxcar. Good old Gabby had given them the slip and was leading them away.

Almost immediately the rumbling noise from the trucks indicated that the car had been banged into rapid motion. The door was still open. I could feel the fresh night air coming in through the opening to eddy

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around the interior of the boxcar.

"You all right?" I asked the girl.

"Yes. . . . Who are you?"

I managed a grin. "Believe it or not, I'm Jayson Burr, who wanted to return the purse you lost. That was when you were masquerading as Muriel Comley. Remember?"

I heard the quick intake of her breath. "*How* did you get here?" she demanded.

"It's a long story. Would you mind telling me just what your name really is?"

"I'm really Lorraine," she said.

"And who's Muriel?"

"Believe it or not, I don't know. About all I do know is that she had an attractive apartment and wanted a roommate to share expenses. I moved in."

I swung around and managed to get a sitting position. "Would you," I asked, "mind telling me something of what this is all about?"

"I don't know."

"Then perhaps you can tell me why you don't know."

She said, "I only moved in with Muriel a few days ago. She seemed very nice. She'd been married, had separated, and recently secured a divorce. Tonight Muriel was to meet someone who was due to come in on a train. I don't even know whether it was a man or a woman. We were in town. I wanted to take a cab to the apartment, so I dropped Muriel at the depot. They said the cab had to take on a full load before it started back. You know the rest. I never realized Muriel had left her purse until she telephoned me at the apartment; then, just after she'd hung up, you telephoned."

The cars were rattling and banging over switches, lurching crazily.

"And then you said *you* were Muriel?"

"Yes, of course. I didn't know who you were, but you had Muriel's purse, and I wanted to get it back for her. I thought it was easier to pretend to be Muriel than to do a lot of explaining, and then have you insist on waiting for Muriel to come back to claim the purse."

"And when I got up there," I said, "you were frightened."

"I'll tell the world I was frightened."

"Can you tell me what happened?"

She said, "There was a man in the apartment all the time, hiding in the bedroom. I didn't know it until after you'd telephoned."

The freight car gave a series of short, quick jerks and bangs, slowed almost to a stop, then slammed in another string of cars, and after a moment the whole string began to roll.

"Sounds as though we're making up a train," I said. "Look here; do you suppose you could lie over on your side and I'd get over as close to you as I could? We'd lie back to back, and you could work on the knots on my wrists with your fingers, and I'd try to untie your wrists."

"It won't cost us anything to try," she said.

We rolled and hitched along the

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floor until we were lying back to back. Somehow, I couldn't get my fingers working. The cords around my wrists made my fumbling fingers seem all thumbs. But she was more successful. I felt the knot slip, heard her say, "I'm getting it, all right. — Ouch! I'll bet I lost a fingernail there. — Hold still; it's coming."

A moment later my wrists were free. I sat up and untied her.

Abruptly, with that jerking lurch which is so characteristic of car switching, the engineer applied the brakes. Lorraine was thrown up against me, and I kept from falling only by grabbing at the side of the car. The partially opened door slammed back until it fetched up with a bang against the end of the iron track, leaving the square doorway wide open. The whole string of cars abruptly slowed.

Suddenly our view was cut off. The doorway seemed to be pushed up against a solid wall of darkness.

"What is it?" Lorraine asked. "A warehouse?"

At that moment the train slammed to a dead stop.

I saw then that our car had been stopped directly opposite another string of boxcars.

"Can you jump across to the ladder on that car opposite?" I asked quickly.

She didn't even bother to answer, simply leaned out of the car, caught the iron ladder on the car opposite, pulled her skirts high, and stepped across. I had to wait a second for her to climb up, so as to leave me a handhold, and in that second the engine gave a snort and a jerk. The car started forward.

"Quick!" Lorraine shouted.

I just missed her leg as I grabbed an iron rung of the ladder and leaned out. It seemed that the car was literally jerked out from under me.

"You all right?" she asked.

"Yes, I took the shock on my other leg." I started down the ladder. "Watch your step," I warned. "The —" I broke off, as I saw the flash of a red light, heard a little toot from the engine whistle, and saw the whole string of cars ahead slide to an abrupt stop. I saw the gleam of a flashlight, then another. Then a beam came slithering along the string of cars.

"Quick!" I said. "Get up to the top and lie down. They're searching for us."

I heard the slight scrape of her feet on the iron rungs as she scampered up the ladder, and I followed, making the best time I could. We flattened out, I on one side of the walk on top of the car, she on the other.

There were voices after that. Shadows danced along the side of a concrete warehouse just above us. I listened, trying to determine whether these men were friends, sent by Gabby to rescue us, or whether they were our captors returning. Then, within ten yards of me, a man's voice said, "This is the end of the cut. They must have swung off while it was moving. They're not in the car. You can see the ropes there on the floor. Why in hell can't Jim tie 'em so

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that they stay tied!"

Another voice: "You can't hold things up any longer without making everybody suspicious. Give them the high-ball. We'll have to catch 'em as they leave the yards. We'll spread out. They can't get away."

Once more shadows danced. The switch engine gave two muted toots of the whistle, started the string of cars into rattling motion.

"Now what?" Lorraine asked.

"Now," I said, "we get out of here just as fast as we can. Come on; let's go."

"Where?"

"Back to the Redderstone Apartments. Unless I'm mistaken, we'll find a police inspector by the name of Fanston somewhere in the building, and we can get action out of him a whole lot quicker than we can explain to some strange cop. . . . Tell me one thing. You said there was a man in your apartment."

"Yes. He heard me talking on the telephone. I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but I gave an exclamation and then asked you to hold the line a minute."

"I noticed it," I said. "What happened?"

"A man stepped out of the bedroom. The first thing I knew I felt the cold circle of a gun muzzle sticking in the back of my neck. Then the man took me away from the telephone for a minute or two, and demanded to know who was talking. I told him it was just someone who wanted to return Muriel's purse."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Marched me back to the telephone with instructions to get you up there at any cost and to insist that I was Muriel."

"And when I came up," I asked, "where was he?"

"In the bedroom. He had the door open a crack. He wasn't where he could see — only listen. That's why I pretended to wish you good night, but slipped out after you. All I wanted at the time was to get out. Later on, downstairs, when I saw the clerk on duty, I conceived the idea of trying to make you give up the purse. I knew you had it under your coat."

"You knew that Muriel came to the hotel and got it back?"

"Yes, of course. She told me you gave it to her.

"Did she tell you what was in it?"

"No. What *was* in it?"

"Would you," I asked abruptly, "be shocked to learn Muriel is an enemy agent?"

"Good heavens! She can't be. Why, she's just a young married woman who found out she made a mistake, and . . ."

"And what does she live on?"

"I don't know. She said she was looking for a position. I supposed she had some money — alimony, perhaps."

I didn't say anything for a few seconds, letting Lorraine get herself adjusted to the idea I'd given her. Then I said, "Just when did you meet Muriel?"

"A little over a week ago. She had

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an ad in the —"

"No, no. I mean tonight, after I left."

She said, "When I left the apartment with you I was frightened stiff. I pretended to go back up to the second floor to the apartment. That was just to fool you and the clerk. Actually, I just took the elevator all the way up to the top floor, waited for five or ten minutes. Then I went back down and walked out."

"The clerk there at the desk then?" I asked.

"No. No one was in the lobby."

"Where did you go?"

"There's a little tearoom down the block where Muriel usually drops in for a bowl of milk toast before she comes to the apartment to go to bed. I went there and waited, frightened stiff."

"How long did you wait?"

"It seemed like ages."

"But you don't know exactly how long it was?"

"No. It was quite a while."

"And she finally came in?"

"Oh, yes."

"That was before she had been to see us?"

"No, afterward. She had her purse."

"And you told her about what had happened in the apartment?"

"Yes."

"What did she do?"

"She seemed quite disturbed. She said she'd notify the police, but it would have to wait until tomorrow, because she had an important appointment to keep."

"And how did you happen to come down here?"

"I didn't want to go back to the apartment alone. Muriel said she had arranged for a pass and that I could come with her. She didn't seem particularly anxious to have me, though."

"Then you and Muriel came down here without going back to the apartment?"

"That's right."

"Hadn't it occurred to you to call the police as soon as you got out of the apartment?"

"Of course."

"Why didn't you do it?"

"Because — well, Muriel's rather secretive about her affairs, and somehow I had an idea she — well, she just wouldn't like it, that's all."

"Isn't that rather an unusual way to look at it?"

"I suppose so, but Muriel's secretive and — well, you see, she's had a divorce and — well, you know how those things are. I thought perhaps it might be something that was connected with the divorce, or an attempt on the part of her ex-husband to get evidence so he could get out of paying alimony, or something of that sort."

"Did Muriel tell you who she was meeting?"

"Yes, a man named Greester, but he never showed up."

"And what did he want?"

"Apparently it was something about her husband. Greester wasn't there, and Muriel didn't tell much.

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We started to walk down the tracks, and then the first thing I knew that car was almost on us. I think I screamed. I remember a man's arm around me, pulling me off the tracks; then I saw you and this other man jump off the car and start toward us. Then three men started toward you — there was that awful fight. I tried to help and — well, they grabbed me and tied me."

"And Muriel?"

"Muriel got away."

"Anyone try to stop her?"

"I think one of the men did. He made a grab for her, but she jerked herself loose."

"It may have been an act?" I asked.

"It might have been an act," she said wearily.

I said, "All right, sister. Now I'm going to tell you something. Muriel is an enemy agent, and in case you want to know what was in that purse, it was a great, big wad of currency totaling seven thousand five hundred dollars. And *that's* why I was so cagey about delivering it."

Lorraine sat perfectly still on top of the boxcar, looking at me, her eyes wide and startled. After a while she said, "I can't believe it."

I didn't argue about it. I peered over the side of the car that was against the warehouse. "I think," I said, "we can manage to squeeze through here. We'll walk back down the length of the train, keeping behind these cars; and we'd better start, I'm going first."

It was dark as a pocket in the narrow space between the cars and the warehouse. There was just room to squeeze along, and I knew that if the train jerked into motion we'd be caught and rolled along between the moving cars and the warehouse until we dropped down under the wheels, but it was our only way out.

Halfway down the string of cars I crawled under and looked back at the track. I could see little spots of light that stabbed the darkness, then subsided, and they were snuffed out, only to glow again. They were still hunting for us.

"See anything?" Lorraine asked as I crawled back to the dark side of the cars.

"No," I said. There was no use scaring the kid to death.

We worked our way down to the end of the cars. There was a stretch of open track, curved rails running up to an iron bumper. Back of that was a concrete wall.

We were trapped.

I felt my way along the wall, hoping I might find a door. Then was when Lorraine saw the flashlights.

"Look," she whispered. "*Lights!* I think they're coming this way."

I simply pulled her in behind the protection of that steel and concrete bumper.

We huddled there for what seemed five or ten minutes. The lights were coming closer. We could see shadows on the concrete wall.

The lights were swinging around now in wider arcs, making bright

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splotches on the concrete wall, intensifying the shadows. Then, when they must have been within twenty yards of us, they quit altogether.

I got to my hands and knees, held my head low down, and peeked out. The track was a vague, indistinct ribbon vanishing into a wall of darkness. I looked for several seconds and couldn't see anything. I decided to chance it.

We turned off the tracks when we came to the end of the warehouse, walked across the yards, and found a gate that was locked from the inside. We unlocked it and went out without seeing a soul.

"You have a key?" I asked Lorraine as we reached the Redderstone Apartments.

She opened her purse, fumbled around for a moment, and handed me a key.

I hesitated before putting it in the lock. "Someone on your floor have a dog?" I asked.

"Yes. I don't know what apartment it is. A cute little woolly dog."

"I heard him barking."

"Yes, he barks once in a while."

"Which end of the corridor from your apartment? Toward the front of the house or the back?"

"The back."

I fitted the key to the lock, held the door open, and Lorraine and I went in. The dimly lit foyer was silent as a tomb.

Halfway to the elevator I paused. "Look, Lorraine; you wait here. If you hear any commotion upstairs, get out just as fast as you can. Go to the nearest telephone and call Police Headquarters. If you *don't* hear anything, wait for me to come back and pick you up."

The door was locked with a night latch. I carefully inserted the key Lorraine had given me and silently slipped back the latch. Then I eased the door open, ready to leap forward and go into action if necessary.

Gabby was sitting in the overstuffed chair, his feet propped up on a straight-backed chair, smoking a cigarette. He was all alone in the room.

"How," I asked, "did *you* get here?"

He turned and grinned. I saw, then, that his left eye was all puffed up. His lip had been cut, and when he grinned it opened up the cut and a few drops of blood started trickling down his chin.

I closed the door behind me. "How'd you make out?"

"Okay," Gabby said. "Did the Military find you?"

"No one found me. I rode a train out of the yards. What about the Military?"

Gabby said, "I sewed that place up. Nobody gets in or out, and they're going through it with a fine-tooth comb."

"Where," I asked, "did you get all that authority?"

"I didn't, I haven't, I ain't," Gabby said. "But in case I forgot to tell you, I'm sort of working under a colonel here, and we're checking up on certain things that happened to

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freight shipments. At first, we didn't think it could have happened in the freight yards, because the records were all straight, but now we're changing our minds mighty fast. I came here to start tracing this stuff from the time it hit the terminal yards until it was delivered."

"Yes," I said, "you neglected to tell me."

Gabby grinned again. "I was afraid I had. Where's the girl spy?"

"That's what I wanted to ask you."

"Cripes!" Gabby said, frowning. "I thought you'd be able to keep *her* lined up."

"You mean you didn't see her?"

"No. What happened to her?"

"Just that she took to her heels is all I know."

Gabby straightened up. "Say, who do you think I'm talking about?"

"Muriel."

"Muriel, nothing!" Gabby snorted. "Muriel's little roommate, Lorraine Dawson, is the one I mean."

"You're all wrong, but we won't argue that now. Where *is* Muriel?"

"In case it's any of your damn' business," Gabby said angrily, "she's in the bedroom changing her clothes."

I started for the bedroom door.

Gabby said, "Don't."

"Why not?"

"She's a decent kid."

I said, "She may be a decent kid, but she's an enemy agent," and flung the door open.

Gabby came out of the chair and toward me fast, but something he saw in my face made him turn toward the bedroom.

It was empty.

"You see?"

Gabby had expression struggling all over his face. He walked across the room to the bedroom window and looked out to the iron platform of the fire escape.

After a minute I said, "Look, Gabby; we're going to get her back. She can't pull this stuff and get away with it. I think Lorraine can help us."

Gabby turned. "Where is Lorraine?"

"Down by the elevator. I left her there while I came up to see that the coast was clear."

Gabby said, "Go get her. We can't wait."

Lorraine wasn't there.

I walked over to the door and looked out on the street. She wasn't there. I came back and climbed the stairs. No sign of her on the stairs.

I went back to the apartment.

Gabby looked up. "Where is she?"

"I don't know." I said, "Suppose you and I quit making damned fools of ourselves. There was a dead man in that bedroom. I don't know what the big idea was with the police claiming it was a plant. You call the law in on a murder case, and right away they start telling you it's all a pipe dream."

"I know," Gabby said.

"All right; it was a body. You can't pick up a body and carry it downstairs under your arm. You can't change the mattress and the sheet and the blankets and the spread and the pil-

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lows on a bed in the middle of the night. The way I see it, there's only one answer."

"The adjoining apartment?"

I nodded.

Gabby said, "How's your leg?"

"Okay."

Gabby said, "Remember, I've got my big automatic, so in case the party gets rough, let's not break any legs over it."

"We won't," I said.

Gabby said, "If you'd come down to earth and be reasonable, I could tell you what happened — just so you won't crack the wrong girl over the head."

"I won't crack the wrong girl."

"Look, Jay; when Muriel came to her apartment this evening she found a man's suit hanging in the closet. It looked as though the suit had just come back from the cleaners. She noticed a bulge in one of the pockets which turned out to be the seventy-five hundred smackers."

"So little Muriel figures finders keepers."

"Muriel happens to be a gal who can look out for herself. The whole thing struck her as damn' fishy, and she decided to sit tight until she discovered what was going on — or at least part of it. It seems there was quite a splash in the papers when her divorce came up and she's allergic to publicity. She had sense enough to realize that either by design or accident she had become involved in something, and she couldn't be sure her husband didn't have a hand in it. Unless it became absolutely necessary she didn't want the cops in on it."

"I still don't see why she carried all that money around with her."

"She wanted to get it to a place of safekeeping, but a guy started to tail her when she left the apartment. She was almost sure she had lost him, but just as she was stepping out of the taxi she thought she saw him again. Apparently without Lorraine seeing her, she slipped her purse back on the seat, and got out. As soon as she was certain she had lost the tail she telephoned the cab company to see if the driver had found her purse."

"How come she didn't spill any of this to Lorraine?"

"I didn't ask her, but my guess is that she thought it would be best all around if she didn't."

"And the switch list with the message?"

"Don't be so damn' sarcastic. A railroad friend of hers gave her that, earlier in the afternoon, arranged for a pass. In case you want to know all about her private life, her husband made a property settlement prior to the divorce. Then he ran out on her and quit paying. This man tipped her off that a chap was working on the night shift at the hump who owed her husband a wad of dough, and told her that she could go down there tonight and he'd take her to this man. She wanted to get the rest of the money her husband had promised her on the property settlement and then forgot to pay."

"Who was this friend," I asked,

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"and will he corroborate her statement?"

Gabby said stiffly, "I haven't had a chance to get her entire story."

I started for the window and got out onto the steel platform of the fire escape. The window which opened on the farther edge of the platform was closed. I slid my knife blade under it and found it wasn't locked.

"Step to one side as soon as you raise it," Gabby whispered.

I got the window up, and was too mad to care about anything. I slipped under Gabby's arm and went in headfirst. Gabby was behind me with the gun, and he could take care of anything that happened.

Nothing happened.

We were in an apartment very similar to the one we'd just left, only arranged in reverse order. The window opened into the bedroom. I could see the bed. It was clean and white, and apparently hadn't been slept in. For all I could see, there was no one in the apartment, and then somehow I had an uneasy feeling that the place was occupied. You could *feel* the presence of human beings.

We moved on a few steps from the window.

"The light switch will be over by the door," I whispered.

"Think we dare to risk the lights?" Gabby asked.

"Gosh, yes. This place gives me the willies . . ."

"Stick 'em up!"

The beam of a flashlight sprang out of nothing and hit my eyes with such a bright glare that it hurt. I saw Gabby's wrist snap around, so that his gun was pointed toward the flashlight. Then Inspector Fanston's voice yelled, "Hold it, soldier! This is the law."

Gabby said, "Put out that damn' flashlight. What are *you* doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?" the inspector asked.

"There's no one here?" Gabby asked.

Fanston said, "Switch on the lights, Smitty."

The light switch clicked the room into illumination.

"Where's the girl?" I asked.

"What girl?" the inspector asked.

"The one that came through the window a few minutes before we did."

"No one came through that window."

"For how long?"

"Ever since we came over here with you. I doped it out that if you saw a body it must have been moved. It looked as though it must have been moved out the window to the fire escape, then across to here. I made a stall to get you boys out of the way, then Smitty and I went to work."

"And you've been waiting here all that time," I demanded, "simply on a hunch that the body might have been —"

"Take it easy," the inspector interrupted. "Show him what we found, Smitty."

The cop opened the closet door.

I looked inside, and saw a bundle of bedclothes wadded up into a ball.

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There were red splotches on them — blood that wasn't old enough even yet to get that rusty brown tint. It looked red and fresh.

"I'll be damned," Gabby said.

"That's the only way they could have come in," Fanston said. "It's perfectly logical. What's more, there are bloodstains on the iron ribs of the fire-escape platform."

"And why," I asked, "are you guarding the bloody clothes and letting the other apartment take care of itself?"

Fanston looked at Smitty, and the look was a question.

"Why not?" Smitty said.

Fanston decided to tell us: "Because, when we looked through that other apartment, we found something. I'll show you."

He led the way back through the window out to the fire escape and then to the girl's apartment. Over in a corner of the bedroom was a fine sprinkle of plaster dust on the floor near the baseboard.

Gabby was the one who got it first. He moved a mirror back out of the way. Behind it was a neat little hole in the plaster and the diaphragm of a dictograph.

That point established, we returned to the other apartment.

"The receiving end of the installation is in here," Fanston continued; "also, the bloody clothes are in here. You can figure what that means. Having put up that dictograph, with the receiving end in this apartment, they're naturally due to come back to watch it — if you fellows haven't messed things up so that you've scared away the quarry we're after."

Suddenly I remembered something. Without waiting to explain my hunch, I hurried out of the room.

I walked down the long corridor, looking at numbers on the doors. I found the apartment I wanted down at the far end of the corridor. The place was dark and silent. The hallway held that peculiar clammy feel which clings to crowded apartment houses along toward morning. A dog yapped once, then quit.

I gently turned the doorknob. When I felt that the latch was free, I pushed tentatively against the door.

The door was jerked open from the inside. Before I could let loose, I was thrown off balance and came stumbling on into the room.

A man's voice said, "All right — you asked for this."

It was dark in the room, with just the faint hint of distant lights seeping through the windows.

They had fed me enough carrots and vitamins to improve my night vision and taught me enough about rough-and-tumble fighting in the dark, so that what came next didn't bother me at all. It was just like going through a training routine.

I knew a blackjack was swinging for my head somewhere in the darkness. I sidestepped, felt a swish of air as something whizzed past where my head had been, saw a dark object in front of me, and, somewhat off balance, figured

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where his bread basket would be, and hit him where he was thickest.

I felt surprised muscles collapsing beneath the force of my blow, heard a "*whoosh*" as the breath went out of him.

Someone cursed behind me. A flame split the darkness wide open. I could feel the hot breath of burning gunpowder against my cheek. I never did hear the bullet crash. My ears were numbed by the sound, but I whirled and struck out with my left.

It was then the knee gave way. I went down in a heap. . . . But they'd taught me all about that in the Army, too. I caught the man's knees as I went down. He struck at my head in the dark with the gun barrel and missed it by a couple of inches. I grabbed for his wrists and didn't connect. He kicked me in the shin and broke loose.

There was a quarter-second of silence. I realized then he had enough light to show him where I was. He was going to shoot.

I flung myself into a quick roll, kicking as I came over. My heel grazed against his knee. A dog was barking frenziedly.

I heard running steps in the corridor. The beam of a flashlight danced around the opening of the door. There were scrambling steps, someone barking an order, a back door opening, and a pell-mell of stampeding feet running down a staircase.

The two officers went storming past me, following the beam of the flashlight. I saw Gabby's long arms raise the window, saw him slide matter-of-factly out to the edge of the sill, heard him say, "All right, boys. That'll be enough. Stick up your hands."

The windowpane above him split into fragments of glass as two bullets came through.

I saw Gabby's arm swing the automatic.

"You all right, Jay?" he asked.

I rolled over on my hands and knees and started getting up. The knee felt weak, the way a thumb feels when you've bent it all the way back and all the strength is gone out of it, but I could hobble along all right.

"Okay," I said.

I went into the bedroom. Before I found the light switch, I could see two long rolls of something stretched out on the bed. Then I found the light switch and clicked on illumination.

They were tied up in sheets, their lips taped shut. Two pair of eyes looked up at me — large, expressive dark eyes and big blue eyes.

I reached over and tried pulling off the tape from their lips. I held the side of Lorraine's cheek, got a good hold on the tape, and gave it a quick jerk.

"Hurt?" I asked.

She looked up at me. "Not much."

I went around the bed to Muriel, worked a corner loose, and then gave her the same treatment.

"You *would* have to do it the hard way!" she flared.

I started untying sheets.

From the outer room I heard Inspector Fanston saying in an odd

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voice, "Good Lord! How did you do it, shooting in the dark? Knocking the legs out from under them."

Gabby didn't even bother to answer the question. He said, "Listen, Inspector; this is purely civilian, see? We don't figure in it at all. We're just witnesses who happened to be in an apartment in the building. Here's a number. Call this number and make a report. They'll tell you what to do. . . . As far as you know, it's a gang of housebreakers that had headquarters here. You even keep the railroad angle out of it. . . . Get me?"

I waited, expecting to hear Fanston ask Gabby who the hell he thought he was. But, instead, Fanston's voice sounded meek and subdued. I knew then the shield in that leather case Gabby was carrying in his pocket was big stuff. The inspector said, "I get you. . . . Smitty, get out in the hallway and get those people back where they belong. Tell them there may be more shooting. And don't let anyone talk with the prisoners."

I heard the whir of a telephone, and Inspector Fanston's voice saying, "Police Headquarters," then Muriel Comley saying, "Leave that sheet where it is. All I've got on underneath is underwear." Her eyes went past me to the doorway and softened. "Oh, hello, Gabby!"

Gabby said, "We can stay right here until things quiet down, and then you can go and —"

"Not in *this* room," Lorraine said.

"What's the matter with it?" Gabby asked.

I looked at Lorraine's eyes, got up and walked across to the closet door, opened it a few inches, and then hastily pushed it shut.

Gabby took one look at my face, and knew the answer.

"Oh, Fanston," he said in a low voice, "the body you're looking for is in here."

Over a breakfast of ham, eggs, and coffee, Gabby told us as much as he ever told us.

"For a long time," he said, "we'd been running into a peculiar type of trouble. Machinery would be tested and double-tested. It would be put aboard freight cars, shipped to various army camps, and tested when it got there. Everything would be all right, but after a while, usually under the stress of combat, the machinery would suddenly go haywire. Part of it we found was due to the old, familiar sabotage of putting a little acid on critical metal parts, and then carefully covering up the slight discoloration. But the other part of it had us completely baffled. A machine would get into combat and suddenly fail. Later on, we'd post-mortem, and find sugar had been introduced into the gasoline. You know what *that* does to an internal combustion motor.

"After a while we found out that all the machinery with which we had this trouble had come through the yards in this city, but that in itself didn't seem to mean anything, because the machinery was tested on arrival at destination and everything

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was all right. But we still kept coming back to that peculiar coincidence that our troubles came with stuff that went through these freight yards.

"I'd had some railroad experience, and I was sent up here to check the whole situation. In the meantime, Carl Greester was working on the hump, and he stumbled onto what was going on. The enemy agents had duplicate tags slightly larger than the regular numbered tags which went on the cars as they came through the switch. By putting on those phony numbers they'd have the cars they wanted switched down to a siding where they had sufficient opportunity to do their work. And it didn't take long.

"After the cars had been entered and sabotaged they'd be resealed, the phony numbers taken off, a couple of dummy cars added, and a switch engine sent down to pick up the cut and redistribute it.

"When Greester found out what was happening, he didn't go to the FBI. He went to the men who were mixed up in it. They bought his silence for seven thousand five hundred dollars. But Greester was afraid to take a bribe in the ordinary manner, and they weren't foolish enough to just park seven thousand five hundred somewhere and go away and leave it for him to pick up. Greester kept insisting that the money be given to him under such circumstances that if there was a double-cross, the FBI couldn't claim he had accepted a bribe.

"Finally they agreed that Greester would send a suit out to be cleaned. When that suit came back from the cleaners it was to be given to the clerk to hang up in Greester's apartment. The bribe money would be in the inside pocket. In that way, if anyone suspected what was happening, Greester could have a perfect alibi. He'd sent his suit to the cleaners. The cleaner returned the suit to the clerk while Greester was on duty at the yards.

"But when the go-between picked up the suit at the cleaners, planted the seventy-five hundred bucks in the pocket, and handed the suit to the desk, he either got mixed up on the numbers, or the clerk did. No names were mentioned, merely apartment numbers. The suit went to two-eighteen instead of two-eighty-one.

"Greester came home, looked for the suit and the bribe money. No suit, no bribe. He asked the clerk if anything had been left for him at the desk. The clerk said no. The gang knew the suit had been delivered. They naturally thought the clerk had frisked it and got the dough.

"They got the thing straightened out, finally. The clerk was a little nincompoop who was always getting figures mixed up. They decided he must have delivered the suit to the wrong apartment. One of the men got into Muriel's apartment with a passkey, found the suit, all right; but the money was gone. He was in there when Lorraine came in, and he had an idea the money might have found

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its way into Muriel's purse. That's why he was so interested in the telephone conversation."

"And the clerk?" I asked.

"The clerk kept thinking over Greester's questions, finally remembered about the suit, and wondered if he hadn't put it in two-eighteen instead of two-eighty-one. He went up to two-eighteen, let himself in with a passkey, and found a man boring holes in the wall and installing a dictograph. . . . We know what happened to the clerk."

"Why the dictograph?" I asked.

"Don't you see? They didn't know whether Muriel was a government agent and they were leading with their chins, or whether it was just a mix-up. Naturally, clubbing the clerk hadn't entered into their plans. They had to get rid of the body."

"They knew we'd discovered that body?" I asked.

"Sure, they did. They were on the other end of the dictograph when we stumbled on it before they'd had a chance to remove it. They evidently waited a while to see if we were going to report it. When they found out we weren't, they tried to whisk it away."

"But Greester must have thrown in with them," I said. "His apartment was two-eighty-one, and —"

"He didn't throw in with them," Gabby said. "Greester tried to play smart. It was unfortunate that he did."

"You mean —?"

"The police discovered his body about daylight this morning, when one of the gang confessed."

"But," Muriel said, "Carl Greester seemed so nice. He told me that a man who owed my husband some money was working down at the switchyards on a night shift, that if I'd come down and see him, I could arrange to get the balance of the money that was due under my property settlement with my husband. He wrote out where I was to meet him shortly after midnight. I . . . Oh, I guess I see now."

Gabby said, "He found out about this man and tipped you off just as a favor, but all the time he was playing with this personal dynamite. He thought he was being smart. All he was doing was signing his own death warrant."

"So they took over Greester's apartment?" I asked.

"Sure. It was bad enough finding Greester's suit in the girl's apartment. But when the girls came down to the switchyard to join Greester around midnight, they became suspicious. They made an excuse to grab Muriel, jerk her out of the way of a freight car, and frisk her purse while they were doing it. As soon as they found out that purse contained seventy-five hundred dollars, the girls were on the spot. Then you and I put in our two-bits worth."

"What's become of the money?" I asked.

"The money," Gabby said, "is in the hands of Uncle Sam. Three men were placed under arrest for tampering with the seals of freight cars. One of them started talking. He's talked enough so Fanston can pin the mur-

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der of the clerk and Carl Greester on the two other men. And the third, who turned state's evidence, will get life as an accessory after the fact."

"How about the man who owed my husband money?" Muriel asked. "Is he one of them?"

Gabby shook his head. "I think you're okay on that. His name is Gulliver. He works under Bob Cuttering. Cuttering's a grouch-face who is pretty much overworked, but he's a good egg just the same."

I said, "I don't see why this man in the bedroom didn't stick me up for Muriel's purse, and —"

"Because you *said* you didn't have it with you. Lorraine could tell, from the way you were holding your left arm against your body, that you did have it. The man in the bedroom could only hear what you'd said. He couldn't see. That's why Lorraine was able to get out of the apartment — talking as though she were slamming the door indignantly on her visitor, but actually slamming herself on the other side of it."

"And Muriel was taken out of the bedroom window while you were in the living-room?"

Gabby nodded.

Lorraine said, "I was never so frightened in my life. While I was waiting down there on the stairs, a man poked the muzzle of a gun into my back and marched me down the corridor."

"The dog was a sort of watchman?" I asked.

Gabby nodded. "When they moved into Greester's apartment, they took the dog with 'em. The dog had been trained on one of those inaudible whistles. Whenever he heard it, he'd bark and try to get out. Whenever anyone entered the place that might make trouble, a guy posted outside would blow the whistle, and the dog would bark. The dog had also been taught to give warning when anyone came near the apartment."

"Well," I said, "I guess that winds up the case."

"Of course," Gabby said, "the colonel insists that he's going to hold us responsible to see nothing happens to these girls — my buddy and me. I told the colonel it might be a little embarrassing. But you know the colonel; he just barked into the telephone, 'Keep those two girls lined up. I don't want them going out with anyone except you and Jay!'"

"You mean we can't have any dates," Muriel demanded, "unless —"

"Exactly," Gabby said sternly. "Those are orders direct from the colonel."

Muriel lowered her lashes. "Well," she conceded, "if it's for my country."

I looked at Lorraine.

She said, "He's got the idea now, Gabby, so you can take your foot away. It's *my* toe you're on."

"What are you two talking about?" Muriel demanded.

"Our duty to our government," Lorraine said self-righteously.

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THE CASE OF POOR GERTRUDE

by ROY VICKERS

LITTLE more than a century ago we used to pelt hunchbacks with oranges at the circus. And as recently as the Edwardian era we were immensely amused by the tragedy of the aging woman robbed by circumstance of her physiological right to a husband. The havoc wrought in her nervous system, often resulting in a deterioration of manners and a loss of personal dignity, were part of the raw material of our music-halls and comic papers. The "old maid" joke got across because everybody knew somebody like that.

One, at least, of these victims of mass-cruelty — the notorious Gertrude Ball — hit back, and with the pitiable device of murder. She made an extraordinarily good job of it, too. The gently nurtured daughter of a rural dean, who had not even read the Sherlock Holmes stories, she danced away from Scotland Yard — baited the police as a matador baits a bull — without the least suspicion that she was being devilishly clever. She had luck — but so, eventually, had the Department of Dead Ends.

In 1908 Gertrude Ball was thirty-five. She lived on the outskirts of the ancient borough of Engeldean in Sussex, with her aunt, Miss Edith Westhorpe. In a small way she was an heiress, for her father had left her over six hundred a year in Consols. Moreover, at twenty she had been reckoned the prettiest girl of her social class in that part of the country. Her photographs show, beneath the elaborate coiffure of the day, wide-set eyes, pretty and vivacious, a little *retroussé* nose, a mouth just a little too pronounced and a rounded, dimpled chin.

In the earlier twenties she had had one definite engagement and two romantic attachments. None of these, however, had eventuated in marriage. There seemed, in fact, to have been a tendency for her admirers to vanish after the first kiss — though, of course, everything was done in a perfectly nice way.

At thirty she was known as "poor Gertrude," and at thirty-five the more charitable dowagers were protesting that there was still hope, on the ground that miracles had been known to happen. To you this sounds exaggerated, for the truth is that nowadays conventions of dress, hygiene and one thing and another permit a woman to look the age that best suits her temperament. But at that time, if a gentlewoman was thirty-five and unmarried, she took to some genteel hobby that kept her at home.

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And then, in the summer of 1908, the dowagers' miracle happened in the person of Wilfred Ankervel — a man in the latter forties, with roots in Engeldean, who had been in Canada for over twenty years, where he had piled up a few thousands as an auctioneer and estate-agent. He was the son of a judge, and had himself been called to the Bar, though he had never tried to practice.

On his return to his native town one can only say that he was seized with love for Gertrude. Suddenly — before they had exchanged a dozen words. But it was not so strange as it now seems, because Gertrude, by blind chance, happened to bear a remarkable physical resemblance to Ankervel's dead wife, whom he had loved exceedingly. The ghost of her gestures, the echo of her voice stampeded him.

Ankervel arrived in the middle of August. In September, in the presence of her aunt, he proposed. Gertrude accepted with calm dignity and even made a stipulation — that whenever he was not actually engaged in his calling he should describe himself as a barrister-at-law. This, she felt, they both owed to the late rural dean.

It will be difficult for you to realize the enormous difference made in the life of such a woman by the right to wear a half-hoop of diamonds on the third finger of her left hand. From a person to whom one was over-civil for fear of hurting her susceptibilities, whom one rarely met outside the social functions of the church, she became the inspiration of a round of picnics, dinner-parties, garden-at-homes, and the like.

Ankervel treated her with a reverence that was very nearly ridiculous. But everyone assumed that it was a Canadian custom and thought it rather charming.

Ankervel had come straight back to the house of his late father, and had installed an elderly housekeeper in charge of two youngish servants. Convention permitted Gertrude to take tea with him as often as he liked. It must have been on one of these occasions that she became aware that he kept a loaded revolver in a little wall safe, together with his mother's jewelry, which would be Gertrude's on their wedding-day.

At his house — on October 3rd — she consented to name the day, November 27th following. He was, we may assume, so entranced with her compliance that he laid aside some of the reverence and for the first time kissed her, as a man kisses the woman he wants to marry.

The kiss, she records in her diary, took place as the clock was striking five on a sunny afternoon. ("*We did not speak after this as I think our hearts were too full. I went out into the garden and in a minute Wilfred was by my side. He was so silent that I was afraid I had lowered myself in his eyes. On the way home through his woods, as we were passing the old quarry, he gently squeezed my arm. I shall always love the old quarry and shall not allow him to*

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have it cleared. He stayed chatting with Aunt E. for a few minutes after I had gone upstairs. Aunt E. is going to post the invitations at once. I do hope people won't send expensive presents. I am so happy.")

At this point the diary stops abruptly. It was not resumed until the last few days of her life.

Nothing much seems to have happened that week except that the invitations were sent. The lovers met, but only for short intervals and, as it happened, in the presence of Miss Westhorpe. This might be accounted for by the fact that Ankervel had decided to buy a partnership in Harshalt's, an old-established local firm of auctioneers and estate-agents. She did not see him at all on Sunday, for he had to spend a duty weekend with some relatives at Cheltenham.

On Monday, October 9th, there occurred the incident of the dream, which subsequently gave the case much of its notoriety. At about four in the morning Annie, the house-parlormaid, heard screams coming from Miss Ball's room. She rushed in, getting there a few seconds before Miss Westhorpe, to find Miss Ball in tears.

"Oh, Annie, I've had such an awful nightmare!" she exclaimed. "I dreamt that I had killed Mr. Ankervel and buried him in the old quarry."

So that was all! Miss Westhorpe gave the necessary soothing replies.

On Tuesday morning there were no screams. But when her aunt taxed her at breakfast with her tired appearance, Gertrude admitted that she had had the dream a second time. Her aunt dutifully laughed it away, though this time she felt a little creepy. A modern aunt would probably have been more alarmed. For an aunt nowadays knows the elements of psychology and might have inferred that in her subconsciousness Gertrude already knew how it was between her and her lover and had determined upon her remedy.

That night Ankervel, having returned from Cheltenham, dined with them, and they told him the story of the dream. He smiled with male superiority, made a joke or two, and forgot it. He left early, excusing himself on the ground that his cousins had kept him up until the small hours every night. He did not see Gertrude alone, but asked her to come to tea at his house the following afternoon.

It was then that he told her, as gently as he could, that he had made a tragic mistake, which must necessarily blight the lives of both of them.

"Of the two abominable courses open to me, I feel that the less cruel, the less dishonorable, is to tell you. . . . A week ago I could have doubted there was a sun in the sky as easily as I could have doubted that I love you. Now — God forgive me, Gertrude! — I esteem you above all women, but I have to ask you to release me from our engagement."

No reason given! And poor Gertrude — as the dowagers would again be calling her — asked for none.

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"Of course, Wilfred!" Twenty years of the discipline of the drawing-room held her steady. "I shall always respect and admire you for speaking to me frankly and giving me the chance to be worthy of your friendship."

Ornate, you will say, and artificial! And, if you like, horribly insincere! But there is a sort of sincerity in good manners, which the Edwardians understood. He was immensely grateful to her for running true to form. Not, of course, that he had really expected her to brawl or sue him for breach of promise. But there it was.

"Please leave all arrangements to me," she asked. "Aunt Edith will cancel the invitations."

We imagine that he groaned heavily.

"Not the least of the suffering I have brought upon you will be the tittle-tattle of those infernal old women!"

Oh, no, not the least by a long way! And not only the old women, but the young women. And the men. The very errand-boys would know about it and snigger. The marriage was suitable in every material and social sense. But the man had escaped while he could.

"Gertrude, you must, of course, allow me to announce that you have broken our engagement on account of an incident in my past life, which need not be specified."

As if anyone would believe that!

"No — no! I will not have you vilify yourself, Wilfred. Our — our friendship has meant too much to me," she said, and possibly believed it. And then: "If you are anxious to spare me I ask you, if you will, to say and do nothing for a few days. Just give me a little time in which to adjust myself. And, if you have no objection, let us behave — in public — as if nothing had happened."

Anything she liked, of course! It was a faintly eccentric request, but it was not for him to cavil, after the way he had been unfortunately compelled to treat her. And after she had been so perfectly ripping about it.

"Just as you like! I will do nothing whatever. I intend to go back to Canada, of course. I shall sell this place and back out of the Harshalt deal. But I will do nothing whatever until you announce that our engagement is at an end. May I see you home, Gertrude?"

When she got home Gertrude said she had a bad headache, and went to bed. There, we may assume, she had a good look at her future. She would again be helping with the Church decorations at Christmas. "Poor Gertrude" once more, she would have to endure the dreadful patronage of the dowagers, less friendly now, because they would feel they had been fooled. Next winter she would again be a wallflower at the Hunt Ball — would know again the subtle agony of having no partner for the supper dance. (*"Poor Gertrude! she had four chances altogether, but each time the man backed out for some reason or other. I rather fancy there must be something about her. . . ."*)

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No. Those three earlier affairs were nothing. The fourth man was madly in love with her. The wedding-day was fixed and then ——

She would have to give him back his ring. She removed it and put it in its little padded jeweler's case. "The London and Montreal Jewelry Co., Ltd." She had never heard of them. No doubt the name had attracted a man fresh from Canada. Dear Wilfred was not very original-minded. The ring itself was a perfectly standard half-hoop.

But it was her ring. It had been her apotheosis and she loved it for itself. She could not bear to part with it. But her own code demanded that she give it back.

With no other thought than that she must have the outward and visible sign of it to console her in secret in the blank years to come she went alone the next morning to Town — to the London and Montreal Jewelry Co. Here she purchased a duplicate for £36. Assured of her unassailable position, she tendered a check which was accepted after they had verified her name and address.

On the afternoon of the next day she again went to Wilfred's house.

"I have had time to adjust my thoughts, Wilfred," she told him after tea. "Tonight I will ask Aunt Edith to put an announcement in *The Times* and we shall both write to a few friends . . . Your ring."

Looking just a little like Ellen Terry in *Cormorant*, she drew it from her finger. He received it with becoming gravity and placed it on the mantelpiece — which, somehow, was too much for her.

"No — no! Lock it away, Wilfred, so that no one can see it," she begged. Now we are entitled to believe that this was the spontaneous expression of her tortured nerves — that there was no dreadful thought behind it. For we know that she had put on her gloves in readiness to go. It is at least certain that she had not at that moment decided how she would murder him — if indeed her full consciousness had decided to murder him at all. We may believe that she was enticed by circumstance.

He opened the wall-safe and put the ring with the other jewelry, and before he shut the safe he blushed and apologized.

"Forgive me. I am very remiss." He pulled from his waistcoat pocket a gold sovereign purse — a common little device that presented each gold coin separately by means of a spring. It had been her engagement present to him and, of course, he wore it on his watch-chain. Three clicks — as he removed three sovereigns from the case and put them in his pocket.

With his fingers he could not prize open the link between the sovereign purse and his watchchain. So he went into the hall for a pair of pliers.

While he was away she took his revolver from the safe and hid it in her muff.

"Perhaps — er — I had better send this by post?"

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"There is no need for you to bother," she answered him. She took the sovereign purse in her left hand, in which she was already holding her handkerchief.

"Will you see me home, Wilfred — for the last time? Let's take the upper path through the woods."

The upper path runs over the crest of the hill and passes near the old quarry. She took him to the verge of the sixty-foot precipice from which there is a view of Engeldean nestling in the valley — a fact which, in the circumstances, lent itself to a little melancholy sentimentalizing.

But it was a chilly evening and she sneezed. As she was about to apply her handkerchief, the gold sovereign purse fell at her feet. There was a moment of mutual confusion in which her foot tipped the sovereign purse over the edge of the little cliff.

"How stupid of me! Don't let us bother about it," she entreated. In a sense, I think, she really was entreating him to save her against herself. But it was of no use.

"We can be there in five minutes," he protested. "There's plenty of light and I have marked the spot."

The precipitous face of the stone, a semicircle cut from the side of the hill, was about a hundred yards from the lower path. In the foreground were boulders, loose stones and nettles and a great deal of rubbish. Over this they clambered together.

In a rough trench beneath the cliff-face Ankervel caught the gleam of the sovereign purse and stooped to pick it up.

As he was rising Gertrude shot him through the back of the head, and flung the revolver into a cavity in the cliff face.

At about a quarter to six — it was now October the 13th, 1908 — Miss Westhorpe was in the hall, when her niece returned.

"Oh, there you are, dear? It's early for a muff, isn't it, though I see Lady Maynton has started hers. Isn't Wilfred coming in for a few minutes?"

"I'm so afraid of getting my chilblains again — it isn't fair to Wilfred to take such a risk. No. He left me at the edge of the woods. He has to write a couple of business letters and then he's coming to dinner. I told him we shouldn't dress tonight — just a cosy little evening, Aunt Edith."

Miss Westhorpe remembered every detail of this conversation, though at the time it made no impression, except that she gave the necessary orders in the kitchen.

They waited dinner half an hour for Wilfred Ankervel, then sat down without him.

("*My niece was a little hurt at first, which I thought only natural in the circumstances,*" *testified Miss Westhorpe on a later occasion.* "*After dinner she suddenly remembered her dream and wanted to send a maid with a note to inquire whether anything had happened to him. I am afraid I was responsible for persuading her that her fears must be groundless.*")

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On the following morning there was neither explanation nor apology from Wilfred Ankervel, so Miss Westhorpe herself ordered the pony-trap and drove to Ankervel's house to make inquiries.

"No, Miss Westhorpe, he didn't come home after he left the house with Miss Ball. But he'd said he might have to go up to London suddenly — and he had some luggage sent down to the station in the morning, so I didn't worry."

The information, in the light of the other three gentlemen who loved and rode away, made Miss Westhorpe uneasy, and she was not sensibly relieved by the way her niece took the news.

"Something has happened to him!" she cried, climbing into the pony-trap. "I'm going for help — I'm going to the police. I tell you, Aunt Edith, I *feel* something has happened."

Her aunt saw that a great deal of talk, at any rate, was going to happen. She could do nothing to restrain her niece, who took the reins and whipped up the pony. In the town they met more than one of their acquaintances to whom Gertrude, with an abandon rare in those days, shouted: "Something has happened to Wilfred — I'm going to the police." Lady Maynton, who was a liberal subscriber to police charities, actually followed them into the police station.

Superintendent Lordways listened politely and then, being an efficient officer, sent a man to the nearby railway station to inquire about the luggage. Presently they learnt that two cabin trunks had been sent, luggage in advance, to the Overseas Club in London. They were unable to say for certain whether Mr. Ankervel had gone up on the evening train, as his ticket had been taken that morning.

"Until we know Mr. Ankervel's movements in London," said the Superintendent, "we've no reason to fear that anything out of the ordinary must have happened."

"Quite so, Mr. Lordways! — that is exactly what I would have said myself," remarked Lady Maynton. And she smiled. And Gertrude saw her smile.

When they had gone Superintendent Lordways stepped across to Mr. Harshalt's offices and asked him whether he could give any information about the man who was believed to be already his partner. Harshalt wanted to know full details and as he heard them he pricked up his ears.

"That's a very funny thing, Lordways," he remarked. "Between you and me, Lordways, Mr. Ankervel has been very queer the last few days. A week ago he was hurrying up the solicitors to produce the draft of our agreement. But when the agreement arrived on Monday, he steadily made excuses for not signing it. There's been no hitch on the business side of it. I couldn't understand it. I wondered whether — very strictly between you and me, Lordways — I wondered whether he contemplated making some change in — er — his

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personal plans."

Lordways thanked him and departed and scrupulously avoided talking about it to anybody. But Harshalt talked quite a lot about it, repeated all Lordways had said and all that he had said.

That afternoon Miss Westhorpe went alone to Mrs. Graigie's at-home. When she got back Gertrude had gone to bed with another headache. At breakfast next morning Gertrude asked:

"What were the people saying at Mrs. Graigie's?"

"I can't possibly tell you," said her aunt — but of course she could, when she was properly pressed to do so. "They're saying he has run away from you," she sobbed.

[redacted]hen mark my words, Aunt [redacted]hey shall apologize to me — [redacted]st of their lives." Gertrude [redacted]— and dreadfully impatient [redacted]hem apologize. Her im- [redacted]drove her to put her head [redacted]ion's mouth. That afternoon [redacted]at the police station.

To Gertrude the police were nice, respectful men like good servants, and the Superintendent was a sort of butler to whom one could unbend without loss of dignity.

"I tell you Mr. Ankervel is dead," she asserted. "I'm as sure of it as if I could see him lying at my feet in this room. I dreamt of it last night. Twice before I have had a similar dream — only before I dreamt that I killed him myself and buried him." And as the Superintendent blinked: "That means, of course, that there was a danger coming to him from which I ought to have protected him."

Now the Superintendent had picked up Mr. Harshalt's hint and in his heart he did not take any serious notice of her. In the end she virtually ordered him to search Mr. Ankervel's woods and out of respect for her late father he gallantly consented to take a couple of men and look round.

In the woods they spent a couple of hours beating the undergrowth on either side of the path without result. It was a messy business, for a fortnight's drought had been broken by heavy rain during the night.

"I don't think we shall find anything here," said Gertrude. "In two of my dreams the body was in the old quarry."

The police were tired and wholly incredulous. But this implacable little old maid with nerves of steel made them beat amongst the boulders and nettles of the old quarry while she hovered on the pathway.

"Nothing here, miss."

"You haven't looked at the back. Oh, please do look properly? I'm sure I'm right!" she shrilled.

There in the rough trench they found the body of Wilfred Ankervell — found, too, the revolver, which they promptly wrapped in a silk handkerchief.

They let Gertrude know they had found him and that he was dead.

"I knew, I knew!" she said and cried a little. While the Superintendent was trying to comfort her, one

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of the men called out:

"There's something in his hand, sir, and I can't open the fingers."

"Use the flat of your jack-knife as a lever. I'm coming."

They levered open the dead fingers and found the gold sovereign purse, empty, slightly dented.

When they reported the find to Gertrude, her strength gave out and she fainted — which the police thought very womanly and appropriate.

That night the Chief Constable called in Scotland Yard, and Dective-Inspector Drayling came down.

"You took it that he had gone up to Town to run away from this girl? And you did nothing about it. The next thing is, the girl takes you by the scruff of the neck and rubs your noses in the murder. And she tells you she dreamt it all. Unluckily for me my Chief never listens when I tell him about people's dreams. Where does Miss Ball live?"

Drayling was with her for a couple of hours and there can be little doubt that she derived a perverted pleasure from the interview. She had started to come home, she said, with Mr. Ankeryel at about five. He had left her at the edge of the wood, she said, in order to go back and write a couple of business letters, after which he was to come to her house for dinner. He cross-examined her and gained nothing but her approval of his thoroughness. She was positively eager to give him her fingerprints.

"Whatever you say, Inspector," she warned him, "I shall always blame myself. I ought to have made him understand his danger. I must tell you that I had a dream ——"

Drayling had to listen to the dreams. She called in Miss Westhorpe to give her version of the dream and then Annie, the house-parlormaid.

That night, in spite of his boast, Drayling was compelled to feature the dream in his report to his superiors.

Before he wrote the report he went to Ankervel's house, where he learnt that the deceased had kept a revolver in the wall-safe, so it might be tentatively assumed that he was shot with his own weapon. It was just possible, he found out, for Miss Ball to have got at that weapon. So, for that matter, could the housekeeper. So, assuming a little simple trickery could almost anyone. Nothing th

He rang up Ankervel's learnt that a will was bein to be signed by Ankervel riage, leaving everything tended wife. Ankervel had died intestate. Nothing th next day he went back to the quarry.

Where had Ankervel been shot? On the path? Impossible to say, for the rain would have washed away any blood.

Had he been shot in the trench? At the foot of the precipice where the body was found? If so, how had he happened to be there at the time of the shooting? Some hundred yards from the path. A most unnatural place for a man to loiter in at about six on an autumn evening. He had not

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been shot above the precipice and dropped over — the doctor had been firm about that.

Well, then, he must have been carried dead to that trench, or enticed there alive. But not by his girl — it was a dirty and uncomfortable spot. And besides, they were not that class.

Miss Ball, he reluctantly decided, must be ruled out of it. A decision which was strengthened by the information that the fingerprints on the revolver were not those of Miss Ball — that they were, in fact, the fingerprints of one George Byker, a petty sneak-thief who had served several short terms of imprisonment.

At the inquest Gertrude told her tale, simple and unshakable — not that anyone tried to shake it. The sovereign purse, slightly dented, was among the exhibits. She identified it as a present given by herself to the deceased. The local jeweler from whom she had bought it confirmed this statement. There was the romantic suggestion that Ankervel had died defending his fiancée's gift, which was quite enough for the jury to return a verdict of "wilfull murder against a person unknown."

Gertrude gave her evidence well and everyone in Court felt keen sympathy for the tragic little woman who seemed to face her bereavement with an almost fierce resignation. It occurred to no one that the same tragic little figure might be burning with hatred against those whose mockery had driven her to the immolation of her conscience. She left the Court on the arm of her aunt, and for several days kept to her bed.

On the day after the inquest the dragnet brought in George Byker.

He was a semi-defective tramp whose original home was in Lewes. His movements were traced to the vicinity of Engeldean at an essential time. From Engeldean he took the train to London on the day following the murder and paid his fare with a gold sovereign. He bought clothes and boots at a second-hand store in Praed Street, also tendering a sovereign. That night he was run in for being drunk and disorderly, and the following morning was fined ten shillings, which again he paid in gold.

He was charged with the murder of Wilfred Ankervel and in due course was committed for trial.

For the defense it was stated that he had spent the night in the quarry, which he knew of old, arriving there at about ten at night. In the morning he was startled to see a corpse lying in the trench and a revolver in a cavity close by. He had picked up the revolver, had handled it a little before putting it back where he had found it. He was afraid to tell the police of his discovery, in view of his record, and he admitted that he had gone through the pockets of the corpse and taken out three pounds in gold and two shillings in silver.

The Prosecution suggested that Byker had accosted Ankervel and attempted to grab his watch, possessing himself of the sovereign purse. There was a scuffle in which the

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sovereign purse rolled to the ground and was trodden on, being crushed against a stone. Ankervel then drew his revolver, threatening the prisoner with it, until he was able to pick up the sovereign purse. Taking Ankervel unawares, the prisoner succeeded in snatching the revolver, whereupon Ankervel ran and hid in the trench, where the prisoner found and shot him. Alternatively, the prisoner might have shot the deceased on the path and carried the body to the trench.

The jury did not bother about such subtleties. A man who would admittedly rob a dead man's body would be capable of anything. After a short retirement they found the prisoner guilty of murder and, possibly because they had been a little hasty, added a recommendation to mercy on account of his feeble intelligence. The judge sentenced him to death and forwarded the recommendation, which was accepted by the Home Secretary, with the result that George Byker went to penal servitude for life.

Gertrude Ball, the gently nurtured daughter of a rural dean, again identified the sovereign purse and again told the simple, unshakable little lie about her own and Ankervel's movements. Counsel for the Prosecution, in thanking her, expressed sympathy on account of her bereavement; the Court associated itself. Gertrude, in short, emerged a popular heroine.

She did not attend the Hunt Ball. But in the spring she went into half-mourning and was occasionally seen at the more important at-homes. She was still "poor Gertrude," but the phrase now had a totally different ring. The dowagers were friendly and confidential, conferring a kind of honorary wifehood upon her. It was considered very appropriate and even rather beautiful that she continued to wear her engagement ring, over a mourning ring.

Altogether she had become a very interesting figure. In the summer she was occasionally seen at tennis parties, though she never played. "Such a sad, beautiful face," someone had said, so she never smiled except sadly. The girls asked her advice as an honorary dowager. Gertrude had found her niche and was happy — while George Byker settled down more or less comfortably at Dartmoor.

The London and Montreal Jewelry Co., Ltd., had passed from an old-fashioned father to an ultra-modern son, who tied himself up rather tightly with a Gaiety girl of the wrong sort.

She had soon absorbed all the legitimate profits of the business, with the indirect result that the accounts and records of the firm were taken charge of by the Public Prosecutor.

Tarrant, of the Department of Dead Ends, was looking through their Special List (in the hope of finding something about the Lowestoft polygamist) when his eye was caught by the entry:

Ball, Gertrude, Miss, The Lindens, Nr. Engeldean, Ring (62), *£36, cheque,*

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Oct. 12th, 1908.

He looked up Ring 62 in their price list: All diamonds, platinum coronet. Ideal and original engagement ring.

One of these had been bought by Gertrude Ball on — yes — *on the day before the murder of her fiancé!* On the face of it there was no connection between the two facts. Tarrant set about the job of making one.

"Never mind about the murder for a moment. Why does an engaged woman buy herself an engagement ring? Because the man is too hard up to buy it for her? But this man was not hard up. Then why?"

Presently Tarrant turned up the report of the trial, found among other things that she had given him a gold sovereign purse. But surely she hadn't also given him a gemmed ring? One never knows. Better make sure.

Ankervel having died intestate, Tarrant obtained leave from the proper official in Chancery to inspect the jewelry, most of which had originally been the property of Ankervel's mother. Here he saw the sovereign purse, with a dent in it. Then a gemmed ring. Comparing it with the illustrated price-list, he was astonished to find what was apparently the very same "ideal and original engagement ring."

A young lady gives her fiancé, of all things under the sun, a gemmed engagement ring? Of course, it might have belonged to Ankervel's mother — in which case there was nothing in it. On the other hand, it might not — in which case it was much too fascinating a problem in the vagaries of human conduct to be ignored.

On the way down to Engeldean, the price list in one pocket, the sovereign purse in another, he thought up a good excuse for troubling Miss Ball, but in the event he did not use it. He was too electrified to see on that lady's hand, above a mourning ring, another exact replica of Engagement Ring No. 62.

He talked some gibberish about the London and Montreal Co. while he felt his way. They were alone together in the morning-room.

Tarrant decided to take a risk. He looked fixedly at the ring until she winced and then:

"Before I go any further, Miss Ball, I think it only fair to tell you that we know you bought that ring yourself. You paid for it with a check for £36 on October the 12th."

"*Oh!*" The fierce little spinster who had twice committed perjury without a tremor collapsed in tears. "Oh — the humiliation!" she sobbed. "It's true — I admit it! But it's not a crime, Mr. Tarrant — need you tell anyone? You will make me the laughing-stock of the county. I could never hold up my head again. You will ruin my whole life."

Tarrant thought of the luckless tramp in Dartmoor and went hard as flint.

"You bought the ring for yourself — a duplicate of the one Mr. Ankervel gave you — because you had to give him back the original one? *Because*

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he had ended your engagement?"

"Yes." In a broken whisper Gertrude admitted the shameful, unforgivable truth that a man had rejected her love. "I was a coward. I couldn't bear people to know that he had — had jilted me as if I had been a servant-girl."

Tarrant saw where he was now and the rest was easy.

"You paid £36 for that ring. . . . What use would the ring have been to you — *if Wilfred Ankervel had lived?*"

It was a simple question, but it was wholly unanswerable. Tarrant repeated it and while he was waiting for the answer that never came, he realized that George Byker had told the truth at his trial. And he remembered that dent in the sovereign purse.

"That ring would have been no use at all if Ankervel had lived. So you shot him yourself. You lured him to that spot by dropping the sovereign purse over the cliff ——"

But Miss Ball had positively stamped her foot.

"Mr. Tarrant, will you have the goodness to stop! I do not care to have such things discussed — still less will I allow them to be published." To Tarrant it looked very like hysteria, but it was nothing of the kind. "I plead guilty to murdering Mr. Ankervel. And I would be obliged if you would say nothing whatever about the circumstances. I shall not mention them myself. And there will, of course, be no trial."

A fragment of legal knowledge which, we may assume, she acquired from the one-time barrister-at-law. She signed a three-line confession, repeated it to the judge and in four minutes was sentenced to death — leaving half her property to her aunt and the other half to George Byker. Engeldean made a totally erroneous guess at the nature of the "felonious malice aforethought."

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PIECES OF SILVER

By BRETT HALLIDAY

THE gringo Thurston? *Si, señor.* I remember him well. I was one of those who went with him on his trip into the hill country exploring for oil.

The trip, *señor*, from which he did not return.

You ask what became of him? That, *señor*, is a question no man may answer with certainty. Not even I, though I have the American education and am known through the Isthmus of Tejauntepec as the smartest man in Mexico.

I understand, *señor*. You are from the American insurance company and have come to Teluocan seeking proof of Thurston's death. I will tell you the story as I know it, and you will have to judge for yourself whether it is the proof you seek.

Seat yourself comfortably here on the veranda and listen well. It is not a long story, but it must begin when the gringo Thurston first stepped off the river boat which comes up from Porto Blanco.

You knew him, perhaps? No? A big man, *señor*, with broad shoulders and eyes holding the cold glitter of ice; a harsh voice, giving loud orders as though he spoke to dogs rather than to free men who have the blue blood of Spanish dons in their veins, mixed with that of native tribes who held this continent long before it was discovered by a wandering Italian sailor.

You comprehend, *señor*, that we of Mexico are a race slow to anger. Gringo Americans mistake this for weakness or fear, and sometimes do not learn their mistake until too late.

Patience, *señor*. It is the story of Thurston I am telling. To understand his end, you must see him as he was when he came arrogantly among us with harsh words on his lips and contempt for us in his heart.

Ay, and with a look in his eyes when he gazed upon our women that was not good. He was a stranger to the tropics and he mistook a simplicity in the clothing of our women for an invitation to evil thoughts.

Be not impatient, *señor*. I seek to make you see the gringo Thurston as we of Teluocan saw him . . . that you may have better understanding of what happened inside such a man when he stood face to face with Lolita Simpson in the jungle.

Si, señor. Señor Simpson is an American, but not a gringo like Thurston. A little man with no hair on his head, and a mild voice. Twenty years ago he came from *Los Estados Unidos* to Teluocan.

Perhaps with scorn you would say he is one who has gone native. It is true that he took a wife from the Jurillo tribe, Indians of the hill coun-

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try. But she has been a loyal wife to him and I think Señor Simpson has not regretted his choice.

With her, he settled near the headwaters of the *Rio Chico*, cleared a small plantation and planted bananas, reared six fine children of which his daughter, Lolita, is eldest.

Señor Simpson was in town for supplies that day when Thurston came on the river-boat.

I saw them meet upon this veranda, *señor*, as I stood close to them three nights later while Lolita danced the *fluencita* beneath the light of flaming torches and the warrant for the gringo Thurston's death was signed.

The gringo stood a head above Simpson, looking down at him with coldness, saying:

"They tell me you have a little two-by-four plantation up the river and could guide me that far on my journey into the hill country."

Señor Simpson looked up at the gringo, then away. It was as though the bad smell was in his nose. But he said:

"Yes. I am in Teluocan for supplies. I will be starting back in the cool of the morning."

"I'm pulling out up-river right after lunch. There's ten dollars in it for you to get together some Mex carriers and guide me as far as your place."

"After lunch is the *siesta* hour," Señor Simpson said. "They have a saying down here that only mad dogs and gringo fools venture into the sun during *siesta*."

The gringo threw back his head and laughed loudly. "Let them call me a gringo fool. I've been called worse."

Señor Simpson shook his head. "It is too hot for men to travel with packs. Tomorrow will be soon enough."

"Damn your *siesta* and your *mananas*," said Thurston. He was like that, *señor*. With a curse for everything not his own way. "If you don't want to earn ten dollars, I'll go alone."

Without anger, Señor Simpson admitted he had use for ten dollars. In a land where *pesos* are scarce, American dollars are much valued. But why, asked Simpson, did the other American wish to go into the hills?

"My business is oil. The geological exploration. I've heard of oil seepages up there. Have you ever seen any?"

Señor Simpson shrugged his shoulders and said he did not know.

The gringo snorted with loudness. "That's the trouble with you Americans that go native. You settle down with some slobby-fat Spick woman and lose all your American push."

I was watching Señor Simpson and I saw the look on his face when Thurston said that to him. It was not a look good to see. For it is true, *señor*, that his wife is not as slender in the waist as when he took her to the priest.

But he rolled a corn-husk *cigarillo* and said nothing. One knew he was thinking it was useless to try to make the gringo Thurston understand . . . and ten American dollars do not drop into one's hands in Teluocan every day.

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In the end, *señor*, the gringo had his way. At the beginning of the *siesta* hour we started up-river. Six of us with packs, Señor Simpson with his two burros carrying supplies for the plantation.

And, mark you, *señor*! The gringo going ahead on the trail carrying a pack heavier than any of the rest.

The midday heat on the Isthmus, you comprehend, is like no heat you will find elsewhere. There is a heaviness that crushes one. The breath comes hard into the lungs because it is steamy thick with vapors.

There is silence in the jungle with even the birds and monkeys retreating deep into shady places. And there is the heavy stink rising upward from damp decay which we of this country learn to endure but not to enjoy.

Through this, the gringo Thurston set such a pace as no man who knew the tropics would attempt. Such a man, *señor*, is a difficult leader. One who is in the pay of such a man cannot well lag behind.

For three hours, *señor*, we in the rear kept up the pace set by Thurston. It was too much, after three hours, for Alberto, the youngest among us.

He was sick in his stomach and could not keep up. His older brother, Pedro, pushed up the trail to tell Señor Simpson we must make the stop for Alberto to rest.

"I am not the *patron*," Señor Simpson told him with regret. "Señor Thurston goes on without resting."

"But he has not the sickness *en la estomacha*," Pedro said. "The other *patron* will stop if you tell him, *señor*."

With the wisdom of the country and of our people, Simpson knew it would be best to rest Alberto's *estomacha*. He stopped and called: "One of your carriers is sick, Thurston."

The gringo turned and came striding back with anger on his face.

"Which of you," asked the gringo with harshness, "pretends the sickness to get a rest?"

Alberto was not without spirit. He lifted his head and said, "It is I. In a little time the sickness will pass. It is the too much heat."

The gringo was not one to hear excuses from weaker men. "It is not hotter for you than for me," he told Alberto. "Get ahead of me on the trail where I may kick your pants when the sickness comes."

It was not, *señor*, the wise thing to say to a sick man. There was a look of hatred on every face, and behind the gringo Pedro's hand went inside his waistband where a sharp knife is always concealed.

It was, *señor*, what you Americans would call the showdown.

The insult brought a blaze to Alberto's eyes but he was too sick to defy the gringo. He shrugged his shoulders and let the pack slide off, saying simply: "I rest here until the sickness goes."

"Not," said the gringo, "while I'm paying you good money. Take your sick belly back to town."

There was heavy breathing and the

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dangerous silence of hate there on the trail, *señor*. More than one hand itched for a knife, but the big gringo faced us with a snarl.

All but Pedro. Pedro was luckily behind him, crouched like a *tigre* of the jungle with hot sunlight gleaming on polished steel in his right hand.

Señor Simpson tried to save the gringo. He stepped forward and said: "You're making a mistake, Thurston. These men won't stand for talk like that."

To Señor Simpson, his own countryman, the gringo said: "Shut up," and it was as though the words were icicles dripping from his mouth.

It was not good to see Señor Simpson back away. One does not enjoy, you comprehend, to see fear soften the backbone of one's friend.

Behind the gringo, Pedro was moving closer. We waited in silence, the rest of us, for the quick death Pedro's knife is known to carry.

Something in our eyes, perhaps, warned the gringo.

He whirled with a quickness remarkable in a man so big . . . and he laughed at sight of Pedro's knife held low for the bellyrip.

A laugh, *señor*, that was more fearful than a curse.

He lunged forward with his fist that was like the kick of a shod mule. Pedro went down to the trail and his knife made a gleaming arc in the sunlight before it was buried in the muck.

There remained four of us . . . none unarmed. But the gringo faced us as we pressed forward, his hand going inside his shirt like a striking snake, coming out with one of your fast-shooting American pistols.

We have a saying in the tropics that hot lead is faster than cold steel. None of us were of a mind to put it to the proof. I hang my head, *señor*, recalling how like a pack of whipped curs we were as the gringo told Alberto to get out of sight down the trail while he ordered the rest of us to divide his pack and move ahead of him.

Pedro went with us, licking blood from his mouth, leaving his knife where it had fallen, and for the remaining hours of that day we stayed far in front of his *pistole*.

The sun was below the treetops before he gave the order to halt. Our rear-ends were dragging behind us, as you Americans would say it, *señor*, and none among us was of a mind for anything but food and rest.

Darkness comes swiftly to the jungle after the sun drops from sight, and the blackness of night was on the trail by the time we had a fire built.

The gringo gave no orders, said not a word to us. He settled himself down-trail with his back against a tree where the firelight flickered on his face.

There was something about that one, *señor*, that gave us pause before lifting a hand against him. We were not timid men, but five of us that night were held by a fear that was more than fear of the gringo's *pistole*.

How to explain it? There is no explanation for the way of a man like Thurston over other men. From him

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there came a feel of evil that took away our courage.

The same evil sense of fear drove us on the next day. It was a journey that men will speak of in hushed voices for many years to come. We in the lead, with the gringo striding behind us; Señor Simpson following behind his burros, prodding them with a sharp stick that they might not lag behind.

Mark you, *señor*. It is a trip of three days from Teluocan to the plantation of Señor Simpson and yet we sighted it late that afternoon . . . after a day and a half on the trail. Of a certainty, *señor*, it is not strange that Americans die young.

A welcome sight the plantation was to us who were as dead men on our feet. Palm-thatched houses in the bend of the river, with rows of banana plants leading back into the jungle.

A dog came yapping to meet us, followed by the running figure of a girl who stopped by the side of the trail at sight of many pack-burdened men instead of only her father.

Si, señor. The girl was Lolita Simpson.

There was the coldness of ice in my veins when she stood for Thurston to look upon her with those eyes which I had seen lighted with unclean fire as he gazed on the innocent young of our village.

How to describe Lolita to you, *señor*?

Dios! but she was more beautiful than I can tell. Beneath her cotton dress were the soft young curves to quicken the heart-beat of any man. With the innocent questioning of childhood in her eyes, a virgin freshness of her cheeks; yet one knew that inside, the red blood of her mother's people ran hot and near the surface.

She was only sixteen, *señor*, but the tropics make a woman at sixteen.

She did not look at us as we passed before her on the trail. Her gaze was for the broad figure of Thurston behind us. *Señor*, the sweat stood on my forehead as I turned my head to watch that meeting.

The gringo stopped in the trail and looked at her with that in his eyes which would have sent her flying for concealment if she had read it aright.

But she knew nothing of the evil lust of men. She was as unawakened and unafraid as any wild young thing of the jungle. Yet, with this difference. American blood was half in her veins with that of the hill tribe.

I think Thurston was the first American she had seen except her father. Who knows what took place inside her? What secret longing was locked in her breast to be lighted to flame by the bold gaze of the gringo?

I saw it happen, *señor*. I saw her take one slow step toward him. Her face was blank like one who is hypnotized.

No one can say what might have happened had not Señor Simpson come up in time. He was panting and there were deep lines of more than weariness on his face.

I heard the gringo say to him: "You are not needed here. Go on . . . while the girl stays with me."

And Señor Simpson replied. "It is

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my daughter, Lolita." His voice was thin, like a tight wire singing in the wind.

Thurston laughed at him. "You don't need to tell me. I can spot a half-breed a mile away."

It would have not been so brutal, *señor*, if he had slapped Simpson on the face.

He turned to the girl and said two words: "Come here."

There was no sound except the heavy breathing of the father. A spell was on the jungle.

It was broken by Señor Simpson's voice shouting, "No!" at Lolita.

She had taken one step forward. She drew back with a frightened look, as though she had just wakened from sleep.

"Go back to the house," her father said in a hoarse voice. "Go quickly."

She went submissively, *señor*, without looking back. And Thurston said: "You can't keep her away from me. She'll come when I crook my finger. It's the breed blood in her."

Murder blazed in Simpson's eyes. There was the feel of death in the air. His lips were back from his teeth and there was no longer the look of mildness on his face.

The gringo laughed. It would have pleased him to kill the man who stood between him and Lolita. His hand went inside his shirt and he waited.

I think, *señor*, I will never live as long a minute, until Señor Simpson turned his head away and began rolling a *cigarillo*. His fingers shook and he spilled tobacco on the trail. Then he went past the gringo toward his house.

He did not ask Thurston to stay at his house. He took his pay from the gringo and had no words for him.

Thurston understood, but he was a man who enjoyed feeling the hatred of other men.

He moved up the river two hundred paces and had us make camp there. He seemed not anxious to go on, telling us he might stay in camp for several days.

Señor Simpson came to me that night under the cover of darkness . . . taking me aside where Thurston could not hear.

He asked me first whether we went on in the morning, nodding with melancholy when I repeated what the gringo had said.

"I am afraid for my Lolita," he said in a sad voice. "She has been acting strangely since meeting Thurston."

I understood. I told him, *señor*, I would do what I could.

He asked me if I would ride into the hills that night bearing a message to Ruoey Urregan, son of the head-man of the Jurillos to whom Lolita was promised in marriage.

I agreed, *señor*, and the message was this: "The betrothal ceremony between you and my Lolita must be at once instead of waiting until next month as planned. Come tomorrow night lest you come too late."

I understood, *señor*. It was the wise strategy to save the girl from herself. Among the Jurillos, the ceremony of betrothal is as binding as marriage.

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And they are a fierce, wild tribe, zealous of the purity of their maidens.

I slipped away from the gringo's camp while he slept, and rode one of Señor Simpson's mules into the hills.

I was proud, *señor*, to have a part in the undoing of the gringo.

I delivered the message and was back in camp before the sun rose again, and before the preparations began for the *baile* that would celebrate the ceremony that night.

Not knowing the reason for the stir, Thurston sat three hours beneath a banyan tree waiting, *señor*, for Lolita to come to him.

True, *señor*, it is hard to understand the ways of such a man. Another might have tried by stealth to see the girl. That was not the gringo's way. It would have pleased him to humble the father by having her come to him openly. But Lolita did not come.

At noon Thurston went to Simpson's house and knocked.

I was in the yard with some others preparing a pit of charcoal for the roast pig on which the guests would feast that night.

Señor Simpson opened the door to the gringo's knock. He had a two-barreled shotgun in his hands which he held pointed at Thurston's belly. I do not know why he did not shoot. You Americans, *señor*, have many ways that are puzzling to us.

He stood in the doorway and told Thurston of the betrothal ceremony. Then he closed the door in the gringo's face.

Thurston went back to his camp on the bank of the river, saying no word to anyone. What his thoughts were, no one could guess.

He was forgotten as the noisy preparations went on. Messengers had gone out to spread news of the festivity and the guests began coming in the afternoon. Native planters riding on burros, with their women and children behind them on foot as was proper. Indians from the jungle, naked but for loin-clothes.

A platform on the wharf was cleared for dancing, banked with pink and white flowers of the mimosa mixed with the flaming blooms of hibiscus and with sprays of jasmine for fragrance. Wood that was heavy with pitch was gathered and tied in bundles with bamboo shoots to the tops of green poles for torches.

In the yard was the chatter of many women and the shrill cries of naked children running between the legs of their elders, the clean smell of wood smoke and the odor of pigs roasting over the charcoal pits.

Ay, a happy, festive scene, *señor*, bringing a smile even to the face of the host as he mingled with his guests and kept his eyes turned away from the camp on the river where Thurston sat motionless, watching.

It was dusk when a band of young bloods from the Jurillo tribe came down from the hills escorting Ruoey Urregan to his betrothal.

Mounted on shaggy native ponies and brandishing spears tipped with iron, they burst like a whirlwind into the clearing with young Urregan

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proudly in the lead.

Dios! but there was a man, *señor*. A true son of many generations of tribal chieftains. Tall, *señor*, and slim of hip, with broad shoulders and muscles rippling beneath the skin.

The gringo, I think, got what you call the full-eye as he watched silently from his place on the river.

Their medicine man came with them to make the ceremony; a shrunken little man with piercing black eyes that were never quiet, and looking to have more than the hundred and fifty years he claims.

They made a half circle there in front of the house while dusk came on swiftly, the young men with their lances held before them, chanting low to the beat of a drum in the hands of the medicine man.

Rouey Urregan stepped to the front as the door opened and Lolita came out on the arm of her father.

Ay! they made a picture, *señor*, that one does not soon forget. Lolita, in a Spanish *mantilla* and a lace gown of black that had been her father's wedding gift to her mother; her tall Indian lover with tight-fitting white pants and a red sash above his waist.

They stood side by side before the medicine man and there was a hush over the watchers.

I, *señor*, am educated and do not believe in the power of ill-smelling herbs burnt over coals and the sing-song of an old man to make magic. But I tell you, *señor*, there was magic in the clearing as darkness came on.

Patience, *señor*. The end is near. I must tell the story my own way for each happening that night is burned upon my memory and has its proper place in what is to come.

Later, there was the dance, the *baile*. There were guitars to make the music, the torches flared in the night air above the platform casting light and shadows upon the moving couples.

Thurston's campfire burned in the darkness close by, but it was late in the evening before he showed his face at the *baile* to which he had no invitation. The guitars were in the slow rhythm of a tango and Lolita was dancing in the arms of her lover when I saw the gringo moving toward Señor Simpson who stood near the edge of the platform.

I stepped forward, *señor*, my blood fired with fear for what was to come.

The gringo's eyes were upon Lolita, feasting themselves upon her young body yielding itself to the movements of her lover. Truly, *señor*, Lolita dancing the tango was a sight to draw the eyes of any man.

The other dancers were stepping back, giving to the affianced couple the entire floor. The tango is the dance of youth, you comprehend, the dance of courtship.

The gringo's gaze clung evilly to Lolita as he stood beside Simpson and said:

"I suppose her sweetheart will be going back into the hills after the *baile*. He's not allowed to hang around her until they're married, is he?"

There was a sneer in his voice,

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señor, but Simpson answered:

"Yes. Back to the hills . . . where you will be going."

Thurston's reply was not one to make Simpson happier: "I'm getting an early start in the morning. I'll finish my work and return soon . . . in time for a little vacation here before I go back to the states. Business before pleasure is my motto."

I was standing close behind Señor Simpson and I saw a trembling take hold of his body.

The gringo's tongue licked his lips. His eyes bulged, watching Lolita.

I moved a little closer, *señor*, and I do not deny that my hand was on my knife. Señor Simpson was my friend and I did not know what was in his mind. He was a father, you comprehend, and the gringo was looking at his daughter.

But more than a tango was to come.

There was the clapping of hands when the dance ended. Lolita and her Jurillo lover faced each other breathlessly. In that moment of silence, a single guitar began tapping out a strange rhythm that was like the distant beat of a jungle drum.

The other guitars took it up one by one and Lolita swayed back in the torchlight, her young bosom lifting the lace of her mother's wedding gown, a look as of dreaminess on her upturned face.

From all about us there came excited cries: "*Ola. Bravo. La fluencita. Aie. La fluencita!*"

Ruoey Urregan stood stiff in the center of the platform with his arms folded and his eyes bright. He turned slowly as Lolita circled about him with her arms curved above her head, fingers snapping like castanets.

It was the *fluencita*, *señor*. The passion-dance of the Jurillos. A sight for a man to carry locked in his memories until he grows old and has need of such memories. A dance, *señor*, which none but an affianced maiden may dance for her lover.

Ay, there was the fever-heat of the jungle in the song of the guitars. A strange note of madness, *señor*, which struck deep inside a man to set the pulse drumming.

Faster and more fast was the beat of the music, and Lolita circled faster and yet faster, stamping her right foot sharply, her eyes holding those of her lover, a strange quiver in every muscle of her young body that was bent backward like a drawn bow.

Ah, *señor*, to see Lolita dance the *fluencita* was to feel again the fierce fire of youth and of love in one's veins. Even now, *señor*, I close my eyes and I stand again beside the platform . . .

But it ended suddenly. Over the heads of the watchers, half a dozen American dollars clattered at Lolita's feet.

The music stopped. Lolita looked down at the coins with round eyes, a flush of shame on her cheeks. Ruoey Urregan whirled about, his face black with anger.

Do you comprehend, *señor?* It was the insult supreme. A sign of contempt such as one makes to a cheap

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dancing girl who entertains men for pay.

The gringo had turned his back and was striding toward the circle of darkness beyond the torchlight. Urregan leaped forward, off the platform in pursuit, his hand going to a dagger in his sash.

But Señor Simpson caught his arm and held him back. I heard him say in the young man's ear:

"No. In his shirt is concealed a pistol. He goes into the hills tomorrow . . . exploring for oil."

That was the end of the *baile, señor.* There were black looks toward the gringo's camp, and muttered threats, but Ruoey Urregan whispered to his friends and they went back into the hills leaving the insult unavenged.

We broke camp before sunrise the next morning. Business before pleasure, you comprehend.

We traveled far that day and made dry camp at night, went upward into the hills until noon the next day when we were approached by two Indians on shaggy ponies. They had heard, they said, that the *Americano* sought for signs of black oil in the hills.

It was so, Thurston told them with excitement. Did they know of such?

They told him of a spring not far away which bubbled up with black scum upon it which would burn. He offered them money to take him there, and they agreed, *señor.*

He went with them eagerly telling us to make camp and await his return.

We stood together and watched while he and the Indians went from sight over a small hill. Pedro crossed himself and said "*Vas con Dios*" through lips that were bruised from the gringo's fist.

We then turned back, *señor,* and no one has seen the gringo Thurston again.

No, *señor.* It would have been useless for us to wait there for him to return. The Indians who guided him away were Jurillos. They have a tribal law that one who insults a woman of their tribe must die before two suns go down.

And they obey that law.

But no, *señor,* it would be useless and perhaps dangerous to look for proof of his death. Even for the purpose of insurance, it would not be wise.

The tribal law of the Jurillos has to do with rubbing honey on the body of their victim and stretching him with grass ropes across a nest of ants. The ants, you comprehend, are without knowledge of American insurance rules and leave little that is recognizable.

He was a fool, you say, to throw money at the feet of Lolita while she danced the *fluencita* for her lover?

But yes, *señor,* that indeed would have been a foolish thing for the gringo to do.

You have misunderstood me, *señor.* It was not the gringo Thurston who threw the money at Lolita's feet. *Dios,* no!

But it was very unwise of him to pay Señor Simpson with American silver dollars.

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THE BATTLE OF COMPETITION

Up to the time of this writing Craig Rice has given her multitudinous fans exactly three short stories about John J. Malone, criminal lawyer and criminal investigator extraordinary. The first was "His Heart Could Break," published in the March 1943 issue of EQMM — a story that has become so popular since its original appearance in EQMM that hardly an anthology issued since has failed to include it. The second tale of John J. Malone is virtually unknown. It was published in a magazine called "Baffling Detective Mysteries" which, like Craig's second story, has lapsed into limbo. The third Malone murder-in-miniature was "Goodbye, Goodbye!" which won a Third Prize in EQMM's First Annual Contest, appearing in the issue of June 1946 and later in the prize-winning anthology, THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1946.

That is the bibliographic background of Craig Rice-and-John J. Malone in the short form. Now here is an interesting anecdote about the middle story . . . One day early in 1945 Craig Rice's literary agent received a telegram from the editor of a detective-story magazine (which shall remain nameless). The telegram went something like this: Understand that Craig Rice has written two short stories only one of which has appeared in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine will buy reprint rights to the other one for — and the editor (who shall also remain nameless) then offered a certain fee. In other words, the editor was willing to purchase a Craig Rice short story without even reading it! That this is an enormous compliment to Craig Rice's talent and reputation goes without saying; but even so, an editorial policy which buys and reprints stories sight unseen, without even knowing the title or where the story had appeared — no matter who the author is — makes even the infinitesimal fuzz of our tonsure rise in shocked protest. As luck would have it, the editor (who shall continue to remain nameless) was prevented from carrying out so short-sighted an editorial policy. You see, we had already read the story and had already purchased exclusive reprint rights to it for EQMM.

Here, then, is Craig Rice's "unknown" short story — the "missing" Malone. Originally called "Dead Men's Shoes," we have with the author's consent changed the title to the more provocative and more ominous (at least, we think so) "The Bad Luck Murders."

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THE BAD LUCK MURDERS

by CRAIG RICE

"My wild — Irish — Rose — the su-weetest flower that grows—" John J. Malone, lawyer, leaned his elbows on the bar and sang it softly, under his breath. It would be only a matter of time, he knew, before some barroom baritone would join in. Then a third voice would be added, and a fourth. One more round, and they'd tackle some really ambitious offerings.

The pudgy little lawyer was celebrating, and with good reason. Only that afternoon one of his favorite clients, one Max Lipsitch, had been acquitted on the charge of maintaining a gambling establishment. Praise had been lavish and the fee large. Malone made a mental resolution not to take any of the fee to Max's place. He'd learned by experience that the wheel was crooked.

The celebration had begun with a tour of the better nightclubs. From there it had moved to Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, after the redhead from the chorus of a current hit show had abandoned Malone in favor of a more prosperous companion. Now it had reached the third, and next to the final stage, among the West Madison saloons, where whiskey came two drinks for a quarter and it wasn't safe to take your hand off your glass long enough to light a cigar.

"My Wild Irish Rose" failed to produce results. Malone ordered another drink, resolving to try again, louder, in a few minutes. Perhaps those two bums on his immediate right, who were splitting two bits worth of whiskey between them. No, they were deep in talk.

". . . but I tell you, when Bad Luck Bradley does you a favor, you're done for."

Malone abandoned his song project and shamelessly eavesdropped.

The younger of the two bums expressed his scorn with a four-letter word. "Look what he did for that Williams guy. Had his teeth fixed, bought him clothes, got him a swell job—"

"Yeah! Whatever's happened to him?"

There was a little silence before the younger man said, "Why — I don't know."

"There you are," the old bum said. "Bad Luck Bradley buys you clothes, gets you a job — and that's all anyone ever hears of you. Nobody knows where you've gone."

"If you two stewbums ain't gonna buy another drink, then scram," the bartender said.

Malone swung quickly around on his stool. "May I buy you another drink, chums?" he said.

The offer was accepted promptly, but with the natural reserve and suspicion of the West Madison Street habitué. It took three drinks, and fifteen minutes of idle conversation,

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before the suspicion was sufficiently allayed for Malone to ask casually.

"Say, who's Bad Luck Bradley?"

The two bums froze silent, glancing first at Malone, then at each other. The little lawyer waited, but without much hope. Evidently the acquaintance hadn't progressed as far as he thought.

"Who's he?" one of the bums said at last.

Almost simultaneously, the other one said, "Never heard of him."

Malone shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know him. Just heard the name somewhere."

Tension was eased a little after that, but it wasn't long before the older man said, "Well, thanks for the drinks, mister," and slid off the barstool. The younger one added, "See'ya again," and the two left.

Malone sighed. He should have known better. The West Madison Street bum was a difficult person to extract information from, wary, suspicious, and secretive. Bartenders and taxi-drivers were always easier sources.

The musical plans were completely forgotten now. He leaned on the bar and addressed the man behind it.

"Did I say the wrong thing to those guys? Who is this Bad Luck Bradley?"

The bartender went on polishing a beer glass. "Don't ask me. They say he's a sucker for a touch. Probably just flophouse talk. Have one on the house?" He spoke cautiously, not looking at Malone.

"Thanks," Malone said.

"You know how superstitious these bums are," the bartender added, warming up a little. "They say if you take a favor from Bad Luck Bradley, you're done for. Just superstition."

Malone nodded, agreeing with him. He reflected, though, that so widespread a superstition usually had some reason for being. This was none of his business, but he was curious.

He polished off the raw, fiery whiskey and decided it was time to go home. He swung halfway around on the barstool, changed his mind, and swung back.

A girl had come in and taken the stool beside him. That would have been enough to cause him to stay, until she was safely out and in a taxi. West Madison Street was no place for an unaccompanied girl, especially a pretty one in expensive clothes.

A second look at the girl would have made him stay anyway, regardless of place or circumstances. She was what he privately called a "warm blonde," with dark gold hair, brown eyes, dark lashes, and a peach-colored skin. She had the face and figure of a cover girl. She wore a bright red wool dress, red suede sandals — in spite of the snow and slush outside — and a fur coat. Her voice, when she ordered a rum and coke, was uncultured but pleasant, and she didn't give the impression she'd led a cultured life. Finally, she looked worried.

She took a gulp of her drink, lit a cigarette, and signaled the bartender to come over.

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"Listen you, can you tell me something? Who's Bad Luck Bradley?"

Malone and the bartender looked at each other. The girl caught the look and turned to Malone.

"What's the gag, buddy?"

"No gag," Malone said, "and a nice girl like you shouldn't be in a joint like this."

The bartender, instead of being insulted, agreed with him.

"I'm not here because I like the atmosphere," she said. "I'm here because I'm looking for somebody. Maybe you two guys can help; if you can, I'll be very grateful." She took a photograph from her red suede purse. "Have you ever seen him around this saloon?"

Malone had never seen the face before, but he studied it with interest. It showed a weakly vicious young man, with an unpleasant leering smile, light hair, and dark eyes. Strangely, it resembled the blonde girl, though there was nothing even remotely weak or vicious about her.

"Sorry," Malone said, giving it back. "Kin of yours?"

"Brother," she said, handing the picture to the bartender.

"I've seen him," the bartender said, nodding. "Been in here a few times. Once in a while he had dough, but most of the time he was cadging drinks." He broke off and said to the girl, "Sorry, lady, I didn't mean—"

"That's okay," she said. "You don't have to tell me anything." She put the picture back in her bag. "I'm trying to find him. No luck so far. A flophouse keeper said that Bad Luck Bradley might have got him, but he wouldn't tell me anything more. So, I'm still looking."

"Lady," Malone said gallantly: "Let me help."

She looked at him thoughtfully. John J. Malone was hardly a prepossessing sight. His thinning black hair was mussed, and he'd acquired a small cut over one eye during a brief discussion with a taxi-driver. His collar was unbuttoned, his tie had worked up under one ear, and there were cigar ashes on his wrinkled vest.

"Thanks," she said, "but who are you?"

"I," Malone said magnificently, "am a lawyer. I am the best damn lawyer from the sunny shores of Maine to the rock-bound coasts of California. I have never lost a client yet, and if anybody can find your brother, I can. My name," he added, almost as an afterthought, "is John Joseph Malone."

"I've heard of you," she said. "Okay, you're on." She finished her drink. "If we just keep combing the dives and flops around here, we're bound to run him down."

The bartender was interested now. He, too, had heard of John J. Malone. Not a bad idea to get on the right side of a guy with Malone's City Hall connections. He parked his elbows on the bar, and began offering suggestions.

The suggestions were good ones, but the girl had been to most of the places mentioned already. Finally he

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rubbed his chin and said, "Well, there's a place run by the city, two blocks up and on a side street. The bums don't go to it except as a last resort, because they make 'em wash and register for jobs. And Bad Luck Bradley goes there regularly—"

The girl's eyes met Malone's. "It's worth trying," the little lawyer said.

Out on the sidewalk, Malone looked at the muddy slush and at the red sandals. "Your shoes," he began.

"The hell with it," she said. "I got twenty more pairs at home. By the way, my name's Gerda Powell."

"Short for Gertie?" Malone asked innocently. She gave him a wicked grin and didn't answer.

They walked in silence down the gaudy shabbiness of West Madison Street and along the dismal and underlighted side street. At the door of the shelter, the girl paused.

"By the way, it's nice of you to help."

"Think nothing of it," Malone said, happily. He was wondering how soon he could ask a few personal questions and suggest a dinner date. "Anyone would be touched at the spectacle of a lovely girl trying to find her brother."

To his surprise, she laughed. It was a shrill, harsh, unpleasant laugh. "You don't get it, mister. I'm not trying to help my poor little brother who's down and out, through no fault of his own. He's the world's prize louse, and all I want to do is fix it so he can't cause any more trouble. He just got out of jail last week, and that's the sixth time since he was fifteen and went to reform school. He was paroled when my old man died, and a week later he stole my old lady's insurance money and scrammed. She took sick and died before I even could get there. Once I thought he'd reformed, he convinced me he was on the up-and-up, and I took him in. He beat it with every piece of jewelry in the place, and then tried to blackmail one of my boyfriends. If I find him, the chances are good that I'll kill him." She looked straight at Malone. "Does that clear things up?"

"Completely," Malone said calmly. "If you do, I'll get you an acquittal. Have you got any money?"

"I have, and nobody's keeping me either. I own a chain of beauty shops."

That was why the name had been faintly familiar. Malone remembered the little shops with modernistic fronts, and GERDA'S written across the plate glass.

He opened the door for her and they went into the dreary building, clean, and smelling of cheap disinfectants. There was nothing in the hall but a registration desk. To the left an open door revealed a slightly more cheerful room with a few wicker armchairs, an upright piano, and a table piled with magazines. Above the door a plaque read: "*Recreation Room. Donated by B. L. Bradley.*"

"B. L. Bad Luck." Malone shuddered slightly, and crossed his fingers.

The man at the desk didn't seem surprised to see John J. Malone and a girl in a fur coat come in. He'd been

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there too long to be surprised at anything. Yes, he remembered the young man of the photograph. He'd stayed there three days, that was as long as anyone was allowed to stay in the shelter. No, no idea where he'd gone when he left day before yesterday. Maybe some of the boys in the recreation room would know.

The "boys" in the recreation room were all either very young men, obviously down on their luck for the first time, or decrepit old bums who were too tired to care whether they stayed in the city shelter or a two-bit flop. It was one of the latter who remembered Joe Powell.

"Bad Luck Bradley got him a job." He spat on the floor. "Too bad, lady. You'll never see him again."

"Nonsense," Malone said.

The bum turned away and went on reading a battered magazine.

"Where can we find Bad Luck Bradley?" Malone demanded.

Another man spoke up. "You'll find him right here, if you wait. He drops around every night and dishes out cigarettes."

"We'll wait," Gerda Powell said firmly. She sat down in one of the wicker chairs, oddly incongruous in the shabby room. Malone lit a cigar and sat down in the chair nearest to her.

It was a half hour or so before the man known as Bad Luck Bradley came in. Malone looked at him curiously. There was certainly nothing about his appearance to suggest that he was a carrier of misfortune. He was a plump, middle-aged man with an amiable, rosy face, friendly blue eyes, and white, curly hair. He trotted in cheerfully, an armful of cigarette cartons under his arm.

"Well, good evening, my friends."

There was only a murmured and perfunctory greeting in answer. A couple of the older bums turned their faces away. Bradley didn't seem to notice.

He put the cartons down on the table and said: "I tried to get all the different brands. And I know you boys always need a little spending money, so I left a couple of dollars apiece for you out at the desk."

There were a few muttered, "Thank you's." Gerda Powell got up, walked across the room and said, "Mr. Bradley?"

He looked at her curiously and said, "Yes."

She took the photograph out of her purse and handed it to him. "That's my brother. I'm looking for him. They told me you got him a job."

"Oh, your brother. Quite a resemblance." He handed back the picture. "Too bad."

"What do you mean, too bad?" Malone asked.

"I'm afraid," Bradley murmured, "your brother is not a very — responsible type. Yes, I did get him a job." He sighed. "He impressed me as a worthwhile and merely unfortunate young man. I outfitted him, got him a shave and a haircut, gave him some money for expenses, and told him to come to my office yester-

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day morning. He never showed up"

"Have you any idea—" Gerda began.

Bradley shook his head. "None whatsoever. He must have taken the money and — skipped. I'm really very sorry."

"So am I," she said grimly. She turned to Malone and said, "Well, I guess we've come to a dead end."

"Maybe," the little lawyer said. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully for a minute. "Let's go back to civilization and buy a drink. And if you'll meet me somewhere tomorrow morning, maybe I'll have some ideas."

He took two steps toward the door, then paused and turned back. "Pardon the curiosity, Mr. Bradley. But what do your initials stand for?"

The philanthropist frowned, puzzled. "Bruce Lawrence. Why?"

"Idle curiosity," Malone said.

"Why bother me?" Daniel von Flanagan of the Homicide Division asked wearily. "It's strictly for the Missing Persons Department." He glared at Malone, looked admiringly at Gerda Powell, and added, "I'm a busy man."

"Missing Persons is no good," Malone said. "All they do is take a name and description and do a routine investigation. But if *you* take it to Missing Persons, and put a little pressure on, maybe they'll do some work."

The big, red-faced police officer tried not to beam at the implied compliment.

"We hate to bother you," Gerda Powell said, "but —" She smiled at him.

Von Flanagan coughed and said, "No bother. Glad to help."

Malone grinned. It was what he'd expected. This morning Gerda Powell had on a bright blue, close-fitting dress with a big silver pin. Her gray sandals exactly matched her kidskin coat.

Von Flanagan squinted. "Funny, these stories you told me about Bradley. The ideas that bums can get!"

"I found out a little about him this morning," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "He's a retired broker, a rich philanthropist, and a very unlucky man. Maybe that's what started the stories. He has a beautiful young wife who's a hopeless invalid. His stepson by a former marriage was killed in an auto crash lately. And his brother died about six months ago when his house burned down. Everything bad seems to happen to him. That — plus his initials being B. L. . . ." He paused. "Good thing I'm not superstitious myself."

"Neither am I," von Flanagan said quickly.

Malone scowled thoughtfully. "It's a damn funny thing, though. He seems to be on the up-and-up. But when a guy gets jobs for flophouse bums, and invariably they disappear—"

"Yeah," von Flanagan said. "Only I don't know how —"

The telephone interrupted him. He picked it up, said, "Yeah?" and sat listening, saying only, "What?"

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"Uh-huh," "Which district?" and finally, "What address?" Suddenly he raised his eyebrows, looked at Malone, and said into the phone, "No, I'll go over myself."

He put down the phone and said: "Here's another funny one. Some guy phoned the fifth district station and said to come right over, he was going to be murdered. Then he hung up, or somebody hung up for him. They traced the call, though. It came from Mr. J. A. Truax's house on North State Street, and Mr. J. A. Truax is Bad Luck Bradley's nephew."

Malone and Gerda Powell looked at each other. "It may not mean a thing," Malone said, "but we're going with you."

The three arrived at the address just thirty seconds behind the squad car. It was von Flanagan who rang the bell.

It was several minutes before a thin, gray-haired woman in neat, housekeeper's black opened the door. Her eyes widened at the sight of the police.

"Somebody here sent for the cops," von Flanagan said.

She shook her head, her face bewildered. "Oh, no, sir. There must be some mistake."

"Ain't this the Truax house?" one of the squad car cops said. She nodded, and he said, "This is the place all right. We're going in."

"Wait," she said, wringing her hands. "Wait, I'll call the doctor . . ."

Von Flanagan said, "What the hell?" and waited.

A moment later a tall, dark-haired, distinguished-looking man came to the door. "What seems to be the difficulty here?"

"Who are you?" one of the cops said.

"I'm Dr. Stark. I was Mr. Truax's physician."

"*Was?*" Malone said.

The doctor nodded. "He died — three hours ago — of injuries received in a skiing accident yesterday."

"Where's the body?" von Flanagan demanded.

"It's already been taken away — to the chapel at 1419 North Woodring Street."

Von Flanagan wrote it down, and then said, "Look, somebody phoned from this house for the police and said he was being murdered."

"Impossible," the doctor said. "There's been some mistake. I assure you, no one has made any telephone calls from this house, and there's been nobody here but the housekeeper and myself." He smiled. "However, if you care to search . . ."

"We do," von Flanagan said. He pushed on into the house, followed by the squad car cops.

The search was a thorough one, took half an hour, and revealed nothing. The house was in perfect order. There was nothing to indicate there had been a murder, attempted murder, or even a call to the police. There was nothing to do but apologize and leave.

The squad car cops were already down the steps when Gerda said

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brusquely, "Say, while I'm here . . ." She pulled out the photograph and said, "Look, doc. Ever see that map before?"

He eyed it curiously and said, "Why?"

"He's my brother," Gerda said, "and I'm looking for him. Mr. Bradley gave him a job, fixed him up with some clothes and dough, and he scrammed. Have you any ideas?"

The doctor looked at the picture for a long time, then at Gerda for a longer one. "It's possible I may be able to find out. If you'll give me your phone number, I'll inform you if I am able to learn anything."

"Thanks," she said, "that's very kind of you." She wrote down the phone number and handed it to him. Malone managed to look over her shoulder and memorize it, while she was writing.

"Sorry to have troubled you," von Flanagan said. He led the way down the steps, his broad face an ominous shade of crimson. He waited until they were in the car before he said: "Following up a call like that would be a routine district matter. You come in with some cockeyed story about some rich guy who goes around making bums disappear and I fall for it and end up asking silly questions and getting sillier answers." He gave Malone a nasty look. "I hope some time you get arrested so I can personally give you the third degree."

"You do," the little lawyer said smoothly, "and I'll tell your wife about that time in South Chicago when you left a glove—"

"That's blackmail," von Flanagan growled, "and I've got a witness. I could arrest you right now."

"You could," Malone said, "but you won't." He turned to Gerda and said, "You see how easy it is to cooperate with the police?"

She smiled at him wearily, said nothing.

Malone leaned forward and said to the driver, "Inspector von Flanagan has to investigate a murder in Joe the Angel's City Hall bar. So, let us out there and beat it. He'll take a taxi back to his office." He beamed at the sulking von Flanagan and said, "The least I can do is to buy you a drink."

The taxi pulled up at the Clark Street entrance of Joe the Angel's. Gerda Powell leaned forward and said, "I'm not getting out here, driver. You can take me to 1766—"

"You can't do this to me," Malone began.

Von Flanagan tactfully started across the sidewalk.

"— and you aren't going to walk off like this. You asked me to help find your brother, and I'm going to find him, alive, dead, or indifferent."

One corner of her mouth smiled. "Forget it. It looks like he's got in another jam, and I hope this is a fatal one. If he hasn't, well, I've been thinking it over and I've decided all I have to do to find him is stay home. Sooner or later he'll turn up to make a touch. I've enjoyed knowing you,

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Mr. Malone, and thanks for the help."

"Wait a minute," Malone said, shoving the cab driver away from the door. "Don't forget my fee. After all, when you hire a lawyer—"

"Send me a bill," she said. This time both corners of her mouth smiled.

"I'll give it to you right now," Malone said. "By way of fee, let me take you to dinner tonight, at L'Aiglon."

This time her eyes smiled, too. "Maybe I'd better retain you on a permanent basis," she said. "I'll meet you in the L'Aiglon bar at seven."

Von Flanagan was waiting just inside the door. "Next time you want to impress a dame—" he began indignantly.

"You're all wrong," the little lawyer said in his smoothest voice. He shoved the police officer on through the bar and said, "We'll take a booth. You're not supposed to drink on duty."

Von Flanagan slid into the booth, muttering something about Malone's upbringing, when the waiter arrived. "Gin and beer."

"Make it two," Malone said. He leaned across the table and said, "How could a man who's been dead for three hours call up the cops and yell for help?"

"Some practical joker," von Flanagan growled.

"'Some practical joker' is the police department's favorite alibi," Malone said. He gulped his gin, chased it down with a small beer, and shuddered. "Except that you traced the call and found it really did come from Truax's house. And Truax is dead, and after he was dead he called the cops and said he was going to be murdered. And he was a nephew of Bad Luck Bradley, who seems to have the evil eye."

"I don't believe a word of it," von Flanagan said. He mopped his brow with a slightly shaking hand. "I told you before, I'm not superstitious."

"This guy was making practice jumps because he was going to enter a championship meet." Malone went on relentlessly. "He seems to have been an expert. Not very many people were around. No one was paying very much attention at the time of the accident. He was making a pretty simple jump — easy stuff for an expert — when he — *fell*."

"If you're implying he was pushed," von Flanagan said, "who pushed him?"

"That's for me to ask, and you to find out," Malone said coyly.

"He was hurt in an accident out at Fox Grove," von Flanagan said. "Died of the injuries. Couldn't have been murdered. He was dead before that phone call came in. And, anyway, who the hell would have wanted to murder him?"

Malone lit a fresh cigar, gazed at the ceiling, and said nothing.

"He didn't have a wife or girl friend or enemy, as far as we can find out," von Flanagan went on. "He didn't have much of any money. Carried a $30,000 life insurance

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policy, with his uncle, B. L. Bradley, as beneficiary. Can you imagine a rich guy like B. L. Bradley murdering his nephew for a measly little $30,000?"

"You never know," Malone said. "It takes all kinds of people to make a world. While you were doing what you like to call investigating at the undertaking parlor, I did a little work on the telephone. All the members of the Bradley family who've kicked off lately, one way or another, carried good-sized insurance policies, with the old man as beneficiary. Thirty grand may not be much to a guy like him, but thirty grand here, fifteen grand there, twenty grand another place — it adds up, as the chorus girl said when she told how she got the mink coat."

"Nonsense," von Flanagan said. There was no conviction in his voice.

"Perfect nonsense," Malone agreed. "But it would be fun to find out where old man Bradley was when the accident occurred. Or maybe Bradley's wife."

"She's an invalid," von Flanagan said. "Never leaves the house." He sighed, and said, "All right, we'll go there. But if you get me into another dead end —"

"If I do," Malone said, "I'll pay for the taxi." He let von Flanagan pay for the drinks, though.

The Bradley mansion was a big, old-fashioned mansion a block from Lake Shore Drive. Bad Luck Bradley's study, where he received them, was a dark, gloomy room, lined with books. The philanthropist himself, plump and pink-faced, seemed a little out-of-place, Malone thought. He should have had a chintz-hung room with big windows and a lawn outside.

Mr. Bradley was delighted to be of any possible service to the police. He regretted, however, that he wasn't able to tell much about the terrible accident to his favorite nephew. He'd been out of town when it happened.

The insurance policy? Well, a year or so ago — no, maybe less — Jack Truax had borrowed thirty thousand dollars from him. Lost that in his business, poor devil. The policy had been taken out by way of security.

Von Flanagan apologized for the intrusion; glared at Malone, and rose.

"Mr. Bradley," Malone said suavely. "Would you mind if we interviewed Mrs. Bradley?"

"Why . . ." Bradley paused and frowned. "I'll ask Dr. Stark. He's with her now. I don't know . . ." Suddenly he looked anxiously at von Flanagan. "You don't think there was anything strange — about Jack's death?"

"Of course not," the officer said.

"Purely routine check-up," Malone added hastily. "In case of accidental death — you understand."

"Oh, yes," Bradley said. "Yes, naturally." He frowned again. "I'll ask Dr. Stark . . ."

Dr. Stark was a little dubious about the interview with Stella Bradley. Of course, if it was necessary — well, be careful not to upset or excite her. He led them upstairs to her room, paused at the door.

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"I'm sure you understand," he said in a very low voice. "She — Mrs. Bradley — well, she's far more ill than anyone knows. Certainly far more than her husband knows. I think — *she* realizes the truth, but just the same . . ." His handsome face contracted momentarily into a pained grimace. "She's still so young. And she was so lovely." He opened the door and ushered them in.

It was a large, luxurious room, shadowy and quiet. The walls were gray and had a few paintings, good ones. The curtains of thick rose damask were drawn over the windows. Walking on the blue and rose carpet was like walking on a new-mown lawn. There was a strange odor in the room, an odor of perfumes and medicine, cosmetics and chloroform, fresh-cut flowers and hospital alcohol.

Stella Bradley sat in a chair near one of the curtained windows, a dusty-pink afghan over her knees. She looked up and smiled at them as they tiptoed across the room. Her face was lovely and very pale, almost blue-white. In the semi-darkness it was impossible to tell if her hair was ash-blonde or silver.

There was something about her that bothered Malone. He felt that he'd seen her before. Her, or someone who was very like her.

Von Flanagan was speechless, and even in the dusky shadows, his broad face was red. Malone scowled. Obviously, it was impossible to ask Stella Bradley where she'd been at the time Jack Truax met his accident. It was just as impossible even to think that — Malone drew a long breath, walked boldly up to her chair and took her hand.

"This is an unpardonable intrusion," he said softly.

"Quite all right," she whispered. She smiled at him faintly. The smile, too, reminded him of someone. He couldn't think for the life of him who it was.

None of the questions he'd intended to ask fitted the occasion. Von Flanagan was standing tongue-tied and embarrassed, fumbling with his hat. Malone had to think of *something*. "Tell me," he said, "do you know any reason why Jack Truax would have wanted to take his own life?"

Her blue eyes widened with surprise. "Jack? Never! He was so alive. So happy. The very day of his — accident — he came in to see me, on his way to Fox Grove. He was vital and gay, and — joyous. He told me he was sure he'd win the championship at the ski meet. He kissed me on the cheek, here —" one frail hand trembled up to touch her white face —"and made some silly little joke, and went away to —" her voice became a little moan — "to his death."

There was a little silence in the room. Dr. Stark signaled them toward the door with his eyes. Malone bowed over her hand and said, "Thank you. You've been very helpful."

Out on the street in front of the Bradley mansion, von Flanagan said furiously: "This is twice today you've stuck my neck out. The second and

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last time. The next time you start having delusions, call a doctor, not the police." He leaped into the waiting taxi, slammed the door in front of Malone's nose and shouted one last, profane comment through the window as the cab drove off.

Malone shrugged, looked after the departing cab, and walked over to Clark Street to take a streetcar, by way of personal chastisement. By the time he'd reached his hotel and begun a leisurely bath, he'd come to the conclusion that von Flanagan was right. Well anyway, he had a date tonight with the most fascinating girl . . .

He cut himself shaving, and spent fifteen minutes fumbling with his tie in nervous anticipation.

At five minutes to seven he was in the L'Aiglon bar. He ordered a whiskey sour and sat watching the door.

It was seven-fifteen when he ordered a second whiskey sour and sent a boy out for newspapers. Women were always late, and Gerda Powell would be no exception.

When seven-thirty came he began to suspect she was going to stand him up. He called for a third drink and went to the telephone booth.

Gerda Powell's maid answered the phone. "Mist' Malone? Miss Powell she say, if yo' call, she's goin' be a li'l late. She wuz jes' fixin' t'leave when somebody call her. She say yo'll unnerstan' when she tell yo' how come, and she ain' goin' be mo'n half a hour late."

Malone started on his third drink. It was now seven-forty-five. The half hour had already stretched a little. He resolved not to wait for her longer than eight o'clock.

Meanwhile, he unfolded the newspapers and began glancing through them. The tragic death of Jack Truax, society sportsman, popular bachelor, and ski champ, was all over page two. There were photographs of Jack Truax, photographs of Bad Luck Bradley, wealthy philanthropist, and Stella Bradley — the latter photograph having been taken before her illness.

Malone looked at the pictures for a long time. Then he called the bartender and completely upset the refined equilibrium of L'Aiglon by ordering a double rye with a beer chaser.

Seeing the pictures, he'd realized the resemblance that had bothered and troubled him. Stella Bradley — save that her hair was a pale blonde — looked like Gerda Powell. Jack Truax looked just a little like the photograph of Gerda Powell's brother.

Malone gulped his rye, paid his check, and headed for the phone booth. He called Dr. Stark's residence. The doctor wasn't in.

"Where can I reach him, right away?" Malone said. He managed to get a convincing quaver into his voice. "We didn't expect the baby quite so soon, but—"

The efficient female voice at the other end of the wire said, "Just a minute." Then, "You can reach Dr.

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Stark at the Bradley home. I'll give you the number."

Malone said, "Never mind," hurried out of the phone booth, out to the sidewalk, and hailed a taxi.

He might be wrong, he told himself. Indeed, he even hoped that he would be wrong. But he didn't dare take a chance on it.

The taxi stopped in front of the Bradley house. Malone flung a bill at the driver and ran up the steps. He didn't have any plan of action in his mind, he just had to be there. It was Bad Luck Bradley himself who opened the door.

"I'm looking for Miss Powell. Gerda Powell. I think she came here to see Dr. Stark."

"You must be mistaken. I don't know any Miss Powell. Dr. Stark — he's —" The philanthropist's face was gray and beaded with sweat. "I'm sorry — you'll have to excuse me . . ."

Malone shoved his foot through, pushing Bradley back, and went into the hall. "I've got to see Dr. Stark," he said.

"You can't. He's — there has to be an emergency operation. On my wife. Her chances aren't good. He couldn't even move her to a hospital. They're going to operate right now. Upstairs. You can't see him now. Not until it's over. Don't you understand?"

"You're damned right I don't understand," Malone said grimly. "And that's why I'm going upstairs."

He'd reached the bottom of the staircase before Bradley tackled him. He sprawled on the floor, picked himself up, and butted Bradley in the stomach. Bradley rose to his knees. Malone landed a blow on his jaw. The white-haired man collapsed quietly on the floor, and Malone raced up the stairs.

The house seemed to be deserted. Not a servant in sight. The little lawyer tried one door after another, finally opened one into a room that was blazing with lights.

"You can't come in here," Dr. Stark's voice said.

Malone went in anyway and kicked the door shut behind him. The room — evidently a guest bedroom — had been made into an improvised operating room. Blinding lights were streaming down from the ceiling. There was a stretcher-table in the middle of the room, on it a white-swathed mummy with a gauze binding over its mouth. There were two nurses and Dr. Stark.

"I'm sorry — Mr. Bradley wanted me to come up and see how it was going . . ."

"Tell him everything's all right," Dr. Stark said. His eyes were deep-set and anguished. "Frankly — don't tell him this, his heart is bad, and he's mentally unstable — there isn't much hope."

Malone said, "Oh!" The lovely invalid in the wheelchair, with the pink afghan over her knees. The pale, tragic face. Now, not much hope. "I'll not — tell Mr. Bradley." He took a few steps toward the operating table. A pair of terrified brown eyes

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stared at him from over the gauze bandages. A wisp of the pale, blonde-gray hair showed under the head-covering. There was horror in the eyes, and desperate appeal. Then the lids closed.

"Good luck," Malone whispered. His voice was hoarse. "I'll — stay with Mr. Bradley — till it's over." He fled into the hall.

Stella Bradley's eyes were blue. Gerda Powell's were brown. There was that resemblance . . .

Malone had once had a client who was an expert shoplifter. The little lawyer came away from the improvised operating room with a pair of rubber gloves and a surgeon's knife.

He put on the gloves. There was a floor lamp in the hall, plugged into the wall. Malone slashed savagely at the wire. There was a blinding flash, and the upstairs lights went out.

In the downstairs hall there was another light. He short-circuited it with another slash of the knife, and the front downstairs lights went out. A third light shone in the kitchen and he disposed of that. There were anxious cries from upstairs and feet running in the hall.

Malone grabbed the phone in the butler's pantry and hastily dialed von Flanagan. "The Bradley house. Murder. Get here fast." Then he dived down the back stairs into the basement.

Malone grabbed the box of live fuses on top of the box and hurled it through the window. In the same moment little, soft, whispering footsteps came up behind him. He started to whirl around, but a blow came down on the back of his head, bright whirling sparks flashed before his eyes, and he fell into a pit of darkness.

The first voice he heard was von Flanagan's. It had an anxious note in it, but it said, "Don't worry, he'll be okay. Malone's tough."

Then Gerda Powell's voice said, "Oh! Please! Do something! Call an ambulance! Call a doctor!"

Malone opened one eyelid an infinitesimal fraction of an inch. Gerda Powell still had on the operating gown, and the gauze head-covering. Her face was white, and lovely. The gown didn't come together all the way, and he confirmed his earlier conviction that her figure was as lovely as her face.

"You'd better go get your clothes on," he said, "because you have a dinner date, and you're late for it. Remember?"

She blushed and fled.

"Poor old Bad Luck Bradley didn't have a thing to do with it," Malone said. "He was just an unknowing stooge." He dug a fork into his salad. "That dame, Stella Bradley, was the real brains behind the racket. Dr. Stark was just taken in like a minnow in a net."

Von Flanagan said, "That's all very fine, but I still don't see—"

"They were going to murder me tonight," Gerda whispered. "That Dr. Stark phoned me and said my

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brother was at the Bradley house. I went there, they bound me, and bleached my hair. Then they tied me on the operating table I was to be operated on, and — die." She choked over her drink.

"Never look at the past," Malone said hastily, "when the future is so bright." He waved at the waiter and said, "Bring three more, while we wait for the dessert." Then he lit his cigar and said, "Poor old Bad Luck Bradley thought he was being a philanthropist. While behind his back Stella Bradley and her boyfriend, Dr. Stark, did the dirty work. They picked bums who faintly resembled someone else, did some hair-dye jobs, and arranged accidents, cashing in on insurance policies. Those accidents all happened to kin-folk of Bradley, who'd taken out policies with him as beneficiary. Your brother—" he turned to Gerda — "happened to look like Jack Truax. Truax pretended to be hurt in a skiing accident. Someone looking like Truax died of injuries inflicted by Dr. Stark. Your brother happened to get loose long enough to phone for help, but it was too late."

"But the insurance money went to *Bradley*," Gerda said.

"Sure," Malone said. "And Bradley had a lovely blonde niece in New York, who was his only living relative. He really did have that niece once, but she's probably in a concrete coffin in the bottom of the East River now. Stella Bradley was able to manage a double life, the time she presumably spent in sanitariums, she really spent building up the phony character as Bradley's niece."

"If I owe you an apology," von Flanagan said, "you can take an I.O.U. for it, and try to collect." He rose, held out a hand to Gerda, and said, "Dance?"

Malone strolled up to the bar, ordered a drink, and stood watching approvingly. She was lovely, very lovely. Her hair was like a silver mist. She danced like a flower in the wind. Von Flanagan would probably go home pretty soon now. Then he and Gerda would begin to make plans.

He killed a little time losing four dollars in a crap game with the bartender. When he looked around again, Gerda was gone, and so was von Flanagan.

The doorman was surprised and helpful. "The young lady? She left fifteen minutes ago, with Mr. von Flanagan."

Malone went back to the bar. Life was altogether sour. Still, there was a guy two stools down who looked as though he might sing a healthy baritone and there was a promising-looking tenor over at the pinball table.

The little lawyer sighed, called for drinks for the house, and began singing, softly, and under his breath.

"*Did your mother come from Ireland—*"

It would only be a matter of time he was sure before someone would join him.

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In one of his truly delightful letters to your Editor, Vincent Cornier once wrote: "These Barnabas Hildreth stories — there were fifteen of them in all — ranged from 'The Stone Ear' to 'The Throat of Green Jasper' . . . the first showing how Hildreth and Ingram met and the last showing exactly WHAT *and* WHO *'Hildreth' was. Incidentally, 'The Stone Ear' has been quoted as being the only known short story in which 'that resolution of climax, hitherto deemed to be ideal and frankly impossible, has been actually achieved — seven thousand words of mystery sustained until the* final one — one word *which alone solves, locks, and limits all perfectly'."*

And now we bring you "The Stone Ear," certainly one of the most amazing adventures of that amazing fellow, Barnabas Hildreth, sometimes known as the "Black Monk." And even if the author had not whetted our curiosity in advance, we would have recognized "The Stone Ear" as one of the most remarkable detective stories it has ever been our privilege to reprint. It is a tour de force in a field where the difficulties of technique make the writing of tours de force an almost lost art. It is that rare story which, we guarantee, you will never quite forget. . . .

THE STONE EAR

by VINCENT CORNIER

UNDER the date-heading of the twenty-third of September, there is an entry in my diary of the year before last to which I have added a rubric. Painstakingly traced in red ink there is mention of my first meeting with that amazing fellow, Barnabas Hildreth, the "Black Monk."

As a matter of fact, my rubric is not wholly in his honor. Rather does it stand as reminder of the most fantastic, certainly the greatest, experience of my life. But man and this are one; there is no possibility of considering either apart. Hildreth . . . and the infernal magnificence of all that arose out of the forgotten centuries to consummate the murder of his uncle Sir Roger Armistead, K.C.

The meeting with Hildreth was in his uncle's house, in Hampstead, on that September night. I had often heard the old man talk of his nephew, but found the fellow extraordinarily elusive. He had cat habits of insolent sort: among them the silent adroitness of making himself scarce at a second's notice. From all I could gather Hildreth was an utterly friendless man simply because he did not choose to admit — again like the cat — that there is much room in this wide earth for two, walking abreast.

Old Sir Roger was more popularly

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known as Mr. Justice Armistead. He retired from the Bench in 1927 and at the time of his death, he was engaged in writing up his reminiscences of "Half a Century of Lore and Law."

The book has never been published. I had an idea at the time it never would be. Armistead was brilliant in law, but a duffer as a *raconteur*.

I tried to help him out. Whenever I had time, during that summer, I made it in my way to tackle his immense manuscript — editing to the bone and re-writing until hardly any of his original words remained.

On the night of the twenty-third of September I had reached a dangerous point. For all he was a judge, well learned in the law, Armistead had casually trafficked with one of the direst bits of libel I have met.

He had stated that, in 1898, he had acted as counsel for the prosecution in a case where a Levantine antique-dealer was arraigned for fraud. In gusto he recounted how he managed his frames of evidence until he had woven such a fabric of damnation about this man that, after the sentence, the judge who sat on the case complimented counsel for his "extraordinary skill in utilizing every fragment and thread of that evidence."

The unfortunate Levantine, one Georges Louis Karleman, was also impressed. He turned to Armistead, before he was led below to begin three years' penal servitude, and vowed his vengeance. It was all very dramatic, and even on Armistead's manuscript one could faintly discern the laughter and contempt with which the threat had been treated.

Had Sir Roger left his account at that, no one need have troubled. But he did not. He immediately went on:

"Nigh on thirty years were to pass before I met Louis Karleman again. I had occasion to visit a certain shop in the West End in pursuit of a matched pair of *Vitro di trina* goblets I learned were for sale.

"I have been a collector of Venetian glass for many years, and some kind but anonymous friend dropped me a hint by letter that these two treasures were for disposal. Naturally I set off post-haste after them.

"Imagine my surprise when I recognized in the shopkeeper my old victim of 1898! Here again the paths of Karleman and myself had crossed . . . not in the vicious traffic of law, but in the peaceful ways of trade. . . .

"The goblets were all as they were described. They were magnificent specimens and I bought them.

"The deal concluded, I could not refrain from mentioning to Karleman (now trading under an *alias*, of course) where last we met. He was very decent about things and half apologized for his melodramatic fury in the dock.

"I came away from his place the happy possessor of the goblets, secure in the belief that vengeance, once again, had become as ashes in the furnace of long time. . . ."

This was atrocious. If the tale were true, then Mr. Justice Armistead, with an insolent disregard for all his legal training, had ventured into definite libel.

Not many people in the West End

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deal in superb examples of Venetian glass. Among them was a man with a prison record. Assuming the volume of reminiscences were published, how many of Armistead's friends — knowing he was a connoisseur, and in all probability having been told where the goblets were purchased — would immediately identify Karleman?

I picked up the alarming manuscript and left the study to interview his careless excellence, Mr. Justice Armistead.

I found his nephew, Barnabas Hildreth, in the drawing-room with the old man. They were peacefully chatting about cricket — I talked bombshells.

Years of rigid newspaper work had bred in me a respect for the pitfalls of printed statement. I recked nothing for young Hildreth; I said all I had to say.

Sir Roger listened amusedly. If he were impressed he took care not to show it. When I had finished he waved my bunch of manuscript away.

"If that's the case, my dear Ingram, I'm sure you'll see your blue pencil deletes the lot. I don't mind."

"*Ah*, but that's not necessary. It's a jolly good yarn up to ——"

"On the contrary," this was the blunt interruption of Barnabas Hildreth, "it's a decidedly nasty bit of work from beginning to end. The first part of its subject matter earned the right of interment in 1898. The remainder is merely salute to implacable vanity. There is a cry of *gloria* all throughout it that is positively inhuman — cruel."

I took a better stock of Barnabas Hildreth than I otherwise would have done. The rich slow voice had a curious and passionate tenderness . . . I looked down into luminous and patient brown eyes abnormally deep-set in a lean and pallid face which was almost that of a saint. I was irritated.

"If that point of view were generally upheld, Mr. Hildreth, I'm afraid half the presses of the country would go off print."

He cranked his skinny hands on his knees and leaned back and laughed.

"What an exhilarating thought," he murmured. "I really must thank you for it! However, don't trouble about me — 'fraid I'm prone to stick my nose into affairs that don't concern me."

I angrily thought the same and turned again to Sir Roger.

"The story is true in its essentials?"

"In its every tiniest detail, Ingram." The old lawyer screwed up his heavily-lined face and grinned. "In fact, I didn't put down half I might have done. For instance, I might have told how Karleman was false to his oath: he swore by its most sacred idioform to kill me; in 1898. I might have twitted about that." He laughed in his scrawny throat. "He's just thirty-two years out, up-to-date."

He was talking as he got out of his chair. He went to an elaborate Chippendale cabinet and touched a switch that filled it with radiance from long flood-lighting tubes. He fumbled for

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his chain of keys.

The amazing beauty of the glass contained in that cabinet delighted me. I knew very little about the subject, yet I was aware that I was regarding treasure. Fantastic and frail specimens, all that I saw, but each had the majestic investiture of the masterpiece.

"These," said Mr. Justice Armistead, "are the goblets."

He swung open the glazed serpentine doors of the cabinet and pointed to a pair of delicate vessels that glowed as rubies glow. Their bowls were splayed and gently moulded, like tiger-lily cups. Their stems were heavy and marvellously ornamented by lion heads. Between their bases and these heads was an intricate white lacework and from the heads to the bowls proper, this airy stuff was continued in a form that was even more exquisite. One had the impression of looking on frozen webs, wound about the January fire of *japonica* flowers.

Hildreth had got up and was at my side.

"Malevolently beautiful," I heard him whisper. "There's too much in 'em of a mad dog's eye for my liking."

Sir Roger laughed again in that dully growling manner of his. He shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"You and your confounded romanticisms, Barnabas! As I've often told you, they'll land you in such a mess one of these days ——"

Hildreth flickered his hands. They caught my mind with a thought of bony white wings; I did not like them.

"We'll not go over all that again, Uncle Roger," he said. "We'd argue till Doomsday. Let's have one of those glasses out. I've many a time wanted to have a good look at 'em."

Sir Roger hesitated. He pursed his lips and appeared dubious. Then he left the cabinet door to swing and went over to a table. After a lot of fussiness — trying the table's stability and what not — he decided he dare risk one of the precious goblets on its top. Gently and slowly he brought it off its rubber plaque and settled it on the table.

Now I can recall that I saw a peculiar change take place in the texture of the glass while Armistead carried it across the room. Its ruby transparency appeared to go and a sullen saffron light came in its place — and then a honey-yellow glare that made the little lion heads look horribly alive .... but, on the table top, that goblet was all crimson again.

This changefulness also captured Hildreth's attention. He glanced from the goblet to the bowl of electric light above, then from it to the inner-lit Chippendale cabinet. His interest seemed to devolve on the serpentine door. He stalked across and gently moved it — but now he watched the goblet carefully.

The sinister beauty of the thing was influencing me strangely.

Sir Roger slowly caressed the goblet and talked about it.

"Made by Petrus Flavianus the Last, in 1561," he told us. "Those masters kept to their ancient Roman

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names, and Petrus was direct in secret line from that Flavianus who is mentioned as a *phiolarius* in the *Ducale* of Vitale Falier, round about the time William of Normandy invaded England."

"What d'you mean by that — 'secret line' — Uncle Roger?"

Armistead looked wry.

"Oh, they were a precious lot, all the breed of them. From all accounts, they hadn't much less devilry than the Borgias. For instance, anything to do with poisons and beautiful glass containers for them, trust a Flavianus to have known. Here we've an example" — he spanged the goblet tenderly and it gave out the sound of a fine metal bell — "this isn't exactly as innocent as it appears."

"I've already noticed that," said Barnabas Hildreth. "Told you at first I didn't like the look of the thing. Now I'm certain I don't."

I seized on this. I was puzzled to determine the reason for Hildreth's casual experiment with the cabinet door and dimly connected it with the eerie changefulness of the goblet's color.

"What makes you say that?"

"Well, Mr. Ingram, I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but the blessed thing altered its hue three times in a matter of two yards — between its removal from the cabinet and its placing on the table. There's something not altogether normal in ——"

Sir Roger was chuckling at his nephew.

"There you go again . . . there you go! Why, man alive, that's nothing to weave mysteries about. That subtle range of color-changes proves the integral worth of the goblet — proves it to be genuine pre-*avanturine* glass. I needn't bore you with technicalities, Barnabas." He was pleased and inclined to be arrogant with it. "No, what I was referring to was the possibility of this being used to poison some poor soul. Look here."

He lifted the goblet, and we peered into it. He pointed out a tiny sac in its base: a minute hollow in the actual stem. Ordinary examination would not have revealed it.

"See the idea — *eh?* Put a deadly poison, in the form of a jelly, in that tiny hole, and what'd happen? When wine was poured in, the jelly would dissolve. The drinker of the draught would die. . . . All the other glasses at the table would be innocent. The wine would be the same as all the other drinkers had taken. Only this one glass would be fatal."

"Happy days," murmured Barnabas Hildreth. "A pledge of hydromel with Borgia — what? *Happy* days!"

"As a matter of fact," a new and astoundingly grim note was in the judge's voice, "the first thing I did when I brought that goblet home from Karleman was to examine that poison gland."

"*Ah!*" sighed Barnabas Hildreth, and crouched over us both, his brown eyes glowing oddly. "We approach the story that matters most, and was not intended to be told."

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"Well, you're right there, Barnabas. You see, I could not trust friend Karleman, even after thirty years. I mentioned in my memoirs that the note informing me where these goblets were was anonymous. And I thought things out."

"It was possible Karleman might have sent it?"

"Quite! After my recognition of him I recalled his oath. What if he *had* sent that note? What if all this were a diabolical trap? Might not Karleman have put solidified poison in that cavity — banking on my doing what glass collectors sometimes do, often do, drinking from it to wet my bargain?" Sir Roger softly ended: "But I had wronged the fellow. There was no poison there."

"Knowing you as I do, Uncle Roger, I don't think you'd jump to those conclusions from mere instinct. Did Karleman *say* anything to make you uneasy?"

Sir Roger slightly touched his tongue between his lips, an adder-dart of pure vexation.

"'Pon my soul, Barnabas, you're an uncanny young dog! I detest your methods — but, I must admit, you don't go very far wrong." He turned to me. "You must understand, Ingram, my nephew is one of that ungodly crew you newspaper people call the 'secret service' . . . agent in Political Intelligence."

I sensed Hildreth's annoyance, although it was disguised behind a suavely dogged insistence:

"Did he *say* anything, Uncle Roger?"

"As a matter of fact, he did suggest something to set me off thinking." Mr. Justice Armistead lifted the goblet and eyed it. "Never told a soul until now . . . but Karleman was oddly concerned about his fatheaded ravings of 'ninety-eight. He appeared both penitent and ashamed; told me to do a thing I'd never dream of doing — to fill up this glass and, in his exact words, 'drink to the memory of a damned ass ——'"

The goblet was not!

It did not break. We heard a sharp and stunning sound, but all we saw was an iridescent haze through which motes fell, as through a shaft of sunshine. . . . But there was the outstretched hand of Sir Roger Armistead, petalled by blood, and empty.

Nothing, not even a tiny shard or splinter of the glass remained. It had utterly and certainly disappeared . . . to leave Sir Roger Armistead crumpling up and dying in the place where he had stood.

He tried to speak, but failed. Then he smiled and his tightening lips shaped the one word, "*Karleman.*" He lolled his head and nodded to the hand that bled. That was his last effort; his eyes dulled, there was a great rigor, and before we had him lifted to a couch, he died.

The thing he had indicated at the last — the thing injuring the heel of his right hand — was a peculiar barb made out of a diamond fragment. It was razor-keen and fashioned like a

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lion's claw. It was half embedded in flesh that was covered by a glittering dustiness which seemed to me to be of gold.

To my bounden surprise the holding of an inquest on Sir Roger was not considered at all necessary. We were told that he had long been suffering from an advanced form of heart disease. For months he had been under medical care. All Hildreth and I had to tell about the miraculously dissipated glass and the diamond barb was listened to with interest, but not concern.

More to placate the dogged Hildreth than anything else, the doctors added a corollary. Sir Roger had been undergoing a palliative treatment in which subcutaneous injections of a drug containing *digitalin* were administered. The last injection was given at five o'clock on that tragic night.

Sir Roger very well understood that he should have gone to bed after this. Instead, he preferred doing as he liked. And *digitalin*, the best example of all poisons where cumulative action is considered, had probably taken toll. In the momentary period of Armistead's shock over the flown glass — the doctors stated — it was possible for the accumulated lethal force of it to have gained command.

There would follow an instant fainting — a major disturbance of the heart — and with no power in reserve to counteract these, death.

Niggling closer to the bone, Hildreth wanted to be told if any evidence of poisoning by a *digitalin* compound had been discovered. Yes; a slight, an exceedingly slight, indication of this was observable; nothing important.

"And there, Ingram," Hildreth growled to me after the medical men had had their say, "the whole affair is officially completed. Karleman has consummated a well-nigh perfect murder." His eyes turned slowly on me, but I felt they could not see. "I am certain of that — absolutely and finally certain. And, somehow or other, I'm going to prove it and make him pay."

In the fortnight that followed I got a lot of information about the eccentrically-minded Barnabas Hildreth. Oddly enough, it came from people of considerable importance. The rank and file of newspaperdom had nothing to tell; he had not passed into their ken.

But an Under Secretary of State looked icily and queerly at me when his name was mentioned.

"A chap best left alone, Mr. Ingram," he said. "I refer you to the fat cats walking on the sunny side of the street. Frankly speaking, Hildreth's just too dangerous an enigma for most people."

Then again — a Cabinet Minister this time:

"Young Hildreth, eh? Now how the devil have you tumbled across him — eh? An eccentric cuss if ever there was one; half-poet, half-scientist — maybe a genius; I can't say."

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"A valuable man, I presume?"

"I think you may. They call him the Black Monk," the Minister made evasive answer. "I haven't heard him at his litanies yet, but no doubt he has 'em pat." Now he glowered truculently. "Anyhow, if you're after him from a Press point of view, cry off! Hildreth's *tabu*, so take a hint, old man."

I went away from Whitehall and pondered. Barnabas Hildreth was just too vital a problem to be left untackled. I remembered I had ways and means of following up elusive people, and I used them.

The reports that came in astounded me . . . A rural dean in Cheshire and a bishop in the south country had recently been Hildreth's prey. He had spent a day or two with the dean and nearly a week with the bishop.

The life clerical having served his obscure purpose he disappeared into Italy. I heard of him in Rome, Venice and Milan. He returned by air and immediately settled down to some kind of investigation which kept him for many hours a day in the Public Records Office in Chancery Lane. I was informed that he appeared especially interested in the chartularies and inventories of the Abbey of Sheringham, dissolved by Henry the Eighth in 1540.

After this phase his attention centred on two or three men, who, I was told, were the greatest authorities on Venetian glass in London. I began to breathe with satisfaction. The circle was nearing its closing round. Whatever his prior investigations meant, these were definitely allotted their place.

He must be still intent on the central fact of the mystery, I argued. That vanished goblet, once from the hands of Petrus Flavianus the Last, and its history, must be his quest. Whatever he had learned, nothing could have arisen to make him falter in his first belief, that Sir Roger Armistead was murdered.

On the night of November the second Barnabas Hildreth called to see me at my office in the building of my newspaper. He arrived at an awkward time, without apology or explanation.

When he was sitting across from me, I realized how apt was his nickname, the Black Monk. He looked haggard, as though from fasts and long disciplines. His features seemed lit by that goblin fire one finds inherent in the matt-white flesh of woodland *fungi*. . . . A curiously unhealthy apparition altogether.

"Might I trouble you a little, Ingram? The British Museum is closed and I want to run through the files of your paper, for June in 1894. Could you accommodate me?"

"*Um* — sorry to appear loath, old man, but wouldn't tomorrow do?" I chuckled at him. "We're a busy lot here this time o' night, you know."

"Tomorrow there's the Museum at call. It's tonight I must settle things. I — I can't rest, Ingram — I can't rest! Don't you see, I — I'm almost at my last gasp?"

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"Rather a strong statement!"

"*Ingram*, you don't understand! On a job like this I scarcely sleep or eat. After a time I begin to crack up. I've only one more matter to verify, and I've done. Stretch a point and let me settle down tonight for the first sound rest I'll have had since September."

As I say, this was November . . . and yet I believed him. I rang for someone to take him into our library.

He became animated.

"You're a sport, Ingram," he cried. "I'll not forget — if I find what I'm after, I might tell you, that hound Karleman's as good as stretched."

"You — you've got things as shipshape as that?" I gasped.

"I really think so," said Barnabas Hildreth.

He went to the library then, with the man I had summoned.

Two days later he came again to see me. He was spruce and alert and entirely different from his crowish self of the second.

"Want to talk to you, Ingram." He tapped a wallet of papers. "Everything here necessary. My uncle *was* murdered . . . by a sound, by a stone, and by a flower that grew on the Plains of Altare, in Italy, four hundred years ago. Those, and Louis Karleman's knowledge of them."

"Here, I say, just a minute! Let's get all that in order. 'By a sound, by a stone, by a ——' "

Hildreth rattled on across my bewildered thoughts:

"Remember that glass — what? First thing that struck us both was its queer faculty for changing color. Crimson in the cabinet, then saffron-brown, then yellow when my uncle held it, then crimson again." I nodded and said I remembered. "Uncle Roger laughed me out of court when I said there was something malevolent in all that — but I was right."

"As a matter of fact," I told him, "I rather agreed with you at the time. Tell me, I couldn't help noticing you experimented somehow or other with the glass door of that cabinet, Hildreth: what for?"

He perked like a Chinese nodding-doll.

"Good man! Blessings on the newspaper nose. I'm glad you noticed that; saves me a lot of wind."

"Well, it was quite obvious ——"

"*Ugh*, was it?" He frowned as a spoilt child will frown and I learned something else about his complex character. But then he went on, as rapidly and brightly as before: "There was light *in* that cabinet, Ingram — those 'floods,' to show up uncle's specimens. And the edges of those glass panels were deeply bevelled, acting exactly as prisms. When the goblet was settled on the table, under the main light of the room, the prismatic radiance transmitted from the flood-lighting tubes brought about the distinct phenomena of polarization in the structure of the glass."

"I'm sure you'll think me stupid, but I don't follow."

"Never mind; you will. I'll come back to that. What's essential just now is the first color change: from

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blood-crimson to brown.

"My uncle mentioned pre-*avanturine* glass. I kept that in mind. *Avanturine* glass, as we know it today, came into vogue in 1600 — oxide of copper added to a glass mixture containing strong reducing agents. When first taken from the crucible the mass is colorless but, on being reheated and allowed to cool slowly it develops a deep ruby hue, speckled throughout its substance by microscopical crystals of metallic copper.

"Before 1600 gold was used for the job. That goblet held gold in a state of extremest tension and in a crystallization bred out of the solution of glass and metal in the first instance of fusing. Due to its slow cooling, its internal stress must have been enormous.

"And — although I did not know it at the time — the absolute proof of there being internal strain is in, the double-refractive properties produced in such glass by passing polarized light throughout it." He rubbed his hands with a little silken sound, and suddenly jutted his head. "I did that with the cabinet glazing. Simple, really . . . the whole thing is reducible to formulae; obedient to the Fresnel-Arrago laws, as they are called. And one Maxwell Garnett, in his studies of this exact glass we're discussing, has shown that its color *must* depend on the diffraction of transmitted light due to intricate polarization by the ultra-microscopical particles of its suspended metal. Where gold is used, the first change is from crimson into brown."

I am afraid I frankly goggled at Hildreth. He took my breath away.

"*Jove!*" I gasped. "You seem to have gone pretty deeply into the matter."

He blinked at me as though wondering what I meant.

"*Deeply?* Oh, that's but the surface of things. I've hardly scratched as yet. If we really must get down to brass tacks, we come to the hellish ingenuity of the dead and gone Petrus Flavianus the Last."

"I recall the name. Go on."

"Y'know, just like playing about with a crossword-puzzle alternative, the poison-sac in that goblet was only a side track. It meant nothing. Death was in, and on, that diamond fragment."

"The thing like a big cat's claw?"

"Yes. It was concealed in one of the goblet *prunts:* those lion heads. And it was poisoned . . . by some alkaloid substance prepared from the foxglove or the figwort. It was a mediaeval poison, with *digitalin* as its base. Held in vacuum, in that hollow *prunt*, its potency would not have altered throughout the centuries. Anyhow, it was sufficiently strong to kill Uncle Roger."

"But — but this is majestic, Hildreth! How the devil you've managed to get together all this ——".

"Be a good soul, Ingram. Don't interrupt. It's all like a lump of lead on my chest, and the sooner I get it off the better. To give you an idea of the 'how' of it — I merely tackled the history of all the glasses from the hand of

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Petrus Flavianus known to have come to England.

"One was a chalice. It was among his earliest works and passed into the possession of the Abbey of Sheringham just before the Dissolution. Thence it went into the keeping of an old church.

"In 1894, at a Church Convocation, a display of ecclesiastical treasures was held. The Sheringham Chalice was among 'em.

"Ordinarily it was on public view in a glass case but, of course, various parsons had it out and privately examined it at privileged times. It was during one of these handlings that it ended its career — much in the same way as that *vitro di trina* goblet ended."

"A bishop is alive today," I smiled, and Hildreth fixed me with a questioning look; I stopped smiling, "who was a curate in a poverty-stricken London parish at that date. It was he who was holding the chalice when it went to dust.

"He was talking, about its enormous worth, to a group of equally poor clerics. 'Is there anything so calculated to arouse one's envious old Adam as handling a thing like this,' he said. Or should have said — he never finished his sentence; 'handling a thing like this' remained unspoken. There was a *rap* like the bursting of an electric light bulb and the chalice had ceased to exist.

"Of course, there was an unholy row about the business. The papers were full of it for days. Your files hold the story *in toto* — and more. They hold, Mr. Ingram, a published letter from a private individual who chanced to know a mighty lot about Venetian glass and the makers of it.

"He mentioned the notorious 'glass of the Ambassador' which ended the career of one Don Philippe Esteban Certava in the year 1489 — a glass made by a Flavianus, one of the secret line."

In the stunned silence he fiddled with his wallet of documents. The snap of the little lock made a hurt along my scalp. My nerves were in rags and my throat burned. He looked more the Black Monk than ever: a dynamic, palpitant yet death-cast human thing. His cold white hands picked up a paper.

"In the late fifteenth century," he went on, "Italy had foregone the glacial beauties of Dante and Petrarch for the sensuous apings of the most florid periods of Roman civilization. It was the cult and fashion of the hour to be Latin beyond all latinity — and at a pseudo-imperial banquet the Duke of Algheri killed Don Philippe, the Spanish envoy, as my uncle was killed: by a sound, by a stone and a flower from the Plains of Altare."

I could hear my own breathing but not that of Barnabas Hildreth. Somewhere a Creed machine rattled and a telephone bell rang insistently — I came out of mediaeval mists to day again.

"Seven men lounged at the low table. One was the Spanish envoy, the guest of honor. The Duke had prom-

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ised him the reward of a diamond star for his embassy — which was strange, for the Duke hated the *don* as a dog hates cats.

"But the envoy got his diamond star. Six men, noble Italians all, arose to their feet to pledge the Spaniard, in ancient Roman style. He sat — again according to the Latin requisition of courtesy — his hands clasped about the *prunts* of his charged goblet, to show amity and to prove he carried no weapon of hurt.

"The six men lifted their goblets. '*Ad ambasciatora!*' they cried. The Spanish envoy died, with a poisoned diamond star held in the grip that had so lately been about his glass.

"And shortly afterwards the Duke wrote a letter to the maker of the deadly glass, this Flavianus," Hildreth put down his paper. "'*É coma una nuova educazione, un mezzo adoperato*,' et cetera, coldly complimenting Flavianus on making that goblet which 'serves as a new instrument, a new method of education.'"

I began to see the light. Somewhere at the back of my mind I had a glimmering of the truth. As by clear echo the last words of the old judge came to me. . . .

"Sinisterly similar circumstances, all of them," I murmured.

"Ah! You grasp the sequence — eh?" Hildreth was excitedly pleased and warmed back to life.

"Oh, yes."

I watched his fanatical face. He swept back his long black hair and remorselessly continued:

"Remember, Petrus the Last was in 'secret line' from his ancestral Roman devil-mongers. His immediate ancestor had killed, by instrument, this Spaniard. . . . Centuries previously the Roman emperor Hadrian had presented his friend Servianus with certain color-changing glass — '*calices versicolores*,' to use his own words — while a Flavianus was a maker of glass to his House.

"Think, Ingram; *think!* That carefully passed-on knowledge of centuries could have become a perfectly instinctive thing to Petrus Flavianus the Last. Might be not have put that poisoned diamond in the *prunt* of the goblet with Pliny-the-Elder's terse '*adamas*' in his mind — with the cry of a Homer or a Pindar over a hero — 'the invincible.'"

He laughed at me.

"No, I'm sorry, old fellow, that wasn't altogether fair play! Let's come to it by different routes. In all cases you will recognize certain exactly defined vowel-sounds, set in exactly similar order. My uncle was to drink, in Karleman's words, to the '*memory of a damned ass.*' The parson, in 'ninety-four, said '*old Adam as. . . .*' The Spanish ambassador heard in his last moments the cry: *Ad ambasciatora*, and, with the mealy pronunciation of the Italian '*B*,' that would resolve to '*A'dam'as*' — and all, *all* I tell you, Ingram, of those key-sounds denote the weapon of death: *adamas* — 'diamond: the invincible.' Too clung together not to be considered." He snapped his fingers. "I

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might as well say now, to save you any inquiry, only *once* in the whole tongue of Italy, and that in those two words used to pledge the envoy's death, does '*a-dam-as*' fall within that order. There was no fear, therefore, of something said in general conversation touching the glass off before its fated time. . . ."

Now I was remembering those curious little eggshell glasses which used to come out of Bohemia. I am much older than Hildreth; the things were a rage in my boyhood.

They cost a few shillings for a set of six. One placed them on a bare table — at, say, a childish conjuring entertainment — and asked someone in the audience to say which glass one had to command to disappear into thin air.

Suppose the glass labelled *D* was selected, then, "Vanish, glass Dee," one called out . . . and, presto, it was gone! It splintered to fragments at the sound of "*Dee.*" The "magic" mechanism was simple, as simple as the sympathetic vibration of a piece of furniture in a room to a certain chord from a piano, and to none other. It was an essay in acoustics. . . . And, in my wondering age, I also recalled that garage doors can be electrically opened to the particular hoot of an owner's car, and to none other — the harness of acoustics.

"You mean, Hildreth, that the *adamas* sound provides the key to the whole series of mysteries?"

"*Precisely!* At the utterance of that sound the terrific internal stresses of the glass, tuned to an absolute sympathy with it, would give way. Think of Prince Rupert Drops . . . molten glass dropped in cold water. The result is a shape like a tadpole, in exactly the same state of strain as that goblet. Scratch or compress the 'tail' of the 'tadpole' and your glass explodes. Rasp a slate pencil near — rub the glass with dirty resin — your glass explodes.

"On the utterance of *adamas* that web of crystallate gold and glass would shatter into dust *and* in the victim's convulsive grasp to save, as his confused brain would think, the glass from falling, his grasp would clench on the poisoned and razor-edged diamond barb. There was *finis.*

"You must observe that the envoy was sitting with his hands about his glass. My uncle had his hand over the lion-heads — and in his convulsive grip drove the diamond splinter in the heel of his hand. . . . And you'll observe that the Sheringham Chalice was also held in hand, although it wasn't provided with any means of death.

"You see, the *vibration* of the utterance of *adamas*, transmitted through the body, through the hands, helped the sound to blow the glass to bits. In the case of the ambassador, a concerted shout from six throats was necessary, since the victim was silent. . . . A little shout would have done but, I suppose, they wanted to make plumb certain. . . ."

"So, Karleman, you believe, knew the secret when he sold the goblets to your uncle?"

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A peculiar shade of feeling was betrayed over Hildreth's face. I sensed he could have told me something quite definite, but all he ended by saying was:

"Doesn't his selection of the words, 'a damned ass,' and a queer insistence on poor Uncle Roger's rite of drinking to that memory tend to prove it? Doubtless Karleman did send that anonymous note. As Uncle suspected, it *was* all a diabolical trap.

'But Petrus Flavianus had more up his sleeve than jellied poison in a hole when he made that goblet — that's where the bother arose."

After a while I asked him:

"Well, and what d'you intend to do about the job?"

Hildreth got to his feet and pensively put his papers away in his wallet. He smiled and pondered. Somehow I was reminded of that Under Secretary's talk about his providing a dangerous enigma. I was worried.

"Oh, I don't know. It's all so tenuous for all it's so sure — I don't know how ever I'd convince the police of everything." He smiled again and I noticed his teeth. "Of course, the absolute proof of everything . . . depends on the remaining goblet."

Shortly after this, in the casual course of news, I was sickened and astounded to learn of the sudden collapse and almost immediate death of a well-known West End antique dealer — a Mr. Barnabas Hildreth was in his shop at the time.

Frenziedly I telephoned Hildreth. He answered to me blandly.

"Tell me, what happened? Was it Karleman?"

"I really fear it was," Hildreth replied. "He seemed wickedly pleased to have the remaining goblet back in his hands. Recalled how he had sold it, as one of a pair, to my uncle years ago." There was a laugh. "Of course, I had to tell him how I inherited Sir Roger's estate, and wasn't interested in Venetian glass. Karleman grinned like a satyr. He said he was; *very!*" A pause, then Hildreth clinched his case. "I can mention it now — Karleman was the man who wrote that letter to your paper in 'ninety-four . . . out of his own mouth was he condemned."

I knew that was what Hildreth had previously held back from me.

"Yes — yes — yes! But about his collapse; what do you know?"

Then Hildreth very gently said:

"Told you the remaining goblet would be proof positive of murder. . . . So soon as Karleman had it in hand I told him, quite loudly, that a man knowing its evil history and yet buying it was nothing more or less, to my mind, than — *a damned ass.*"

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

WITHOUT other preamble, here are this department's nominations for best performances in the crime-mystery field during the publishing year 1947, arranged chronologically within the principal types:

Puzzle & Plot

DEATH OF A TRAIN by Freeman Wills Crofts (Dodd). In which an Old Master proves that burial rites for Scotland Yard are slightly premature. Chiefly for traditionalists.

HALO FOR NOBODY by Henry Kane (S. & S.). In a far-from-banner year for the American private eye, this comparatively unjaded yearling scores by default.

THE BONE IS POINTED by Arthur Upfield (Crime Club). Australia's Napoleon Bonaparte triumphs over black magic — and a long-winded narrator.

DEATH OF A DOLL by Hilda Lawrence (S. & S.). Special honors for the year's most accomplished blending of suspense and deduction.

THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT by Fredric Brown (Dutton). Its wry freshness, imagination, and unpretentious competence win this department's vote for best American "first" of 1947. (But a choice bouquet of scallions to the publisher for the year's widest-of-the-mark blurbing.)

FINAL CURTAIN by Ngaio Marsh (Little). Not Miss Marsh's top performance by any means, but the season's likeliest offering in the Dorothy Sayers tradition.

UNTIDY MURDER by Frances & Richard Lockridge (Lippincott). With Pam and Jerry North on the sidelines, this is Bill and Dorian Weigand's story, and meatier than most.

LAST YEAR'S BLOOD by H. C. Branson (S. & S.). Solidity rather than speed is the virtue of this full-bodied, meticulous American chess puzzle.

Crime & Punishment

DISPOSING OF HENRY by Roger Bax (Harper). The rise and downfall of a murderess, told in the reverse-English style made famous by Francis Iles.

THE CHAIR FOR MARTIN ROME by Henry Edward Helseth (Dodd). Powerful and compassionate (some said sentimentalized) genre painting of a criminal and his girl.

COME AND BE KILLED! by Shelley Smith (Harper). Another dryly able case history, with detective epilogue.

STRANGE STORY by Hilda Lewis (Random). Most clinical of the year's crop, a grim but compelling study of family jealousy and frustration, culminating in violence and death.

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE by Edgar Lustgarten (Scribner). A provocative and disturbing English first novel, in your reporter's estimation not only the best courtroom fiction since VERDICT OF TWELVE, but also 1947's most distinguished performance in the crime-mystery field.

IN A LONELY PLACE by Dorothy B. Hughes (Duell). The Lodger Legend, vividly re-spun in modern dress — though some readers felt the background for murder was insufficiently indicated.

Spies & Pursuit

HOUSE OF DARKNESS by Allan MacKinnon (Crime Club). High adventure in the Buchan manner and scene. Improbable — and thoroughly delightful.

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Anthology

FAMOUS STORIES OF CODE AND CIPHER edited by Raymond T. Bond (Rinehart). In a by-no-means negligible year for anthologies (see below) this carefully considered collection wins top rating for taste, form, authority.

Numerically speaking, 1947's total of mysteries and near-mysteries will apparently surpass those published in 1946 by a fairly substantial margin. I use the future tense and say "apparently" because these lines, which you will read in midwinter, are set down on Thanksgiving Day; such is the nature of magazine deadlines. I can only assume and hope that I have seen advance galley proofs on all 1947 titles and that there will be no last minute additions or postponements. Another factor which makes exact tabulation difficult, and the reviewer's task likewise, is the increasing number of mystery-type novels disguised by the publishers as "straight" fiction, in the quite understandable hope of breaking through the mystery sales-ceiling. These were more numerous in 1947 than ever before, and I'm by no means sure I have tracked them all down.

Assessing the year's output critically, my feeling is that the peaks were somewhat fewer than in past years, the valleys more numerous and deeper — and the middle, oh so middling. The best and most interesting writing, it seemed to me, occurred in the unorthodox bracket which I have called "crime and punishment" above; but candor hastens admission that this category also included a disconcerting proportion of the shoddy, the over-wrought, the merely sensational. The deductive whodunit ran less to extremes, but achieved in the mass a sort of listless competence difficult to condemn and equally difficult to enthuse about. With only a few exceptions, the hardboiled and humorous subdivisions seemed especially barren of fresh material or treatment. An interesting development of the year, and perhaps the most encouraging omen for the long pull, was the return of British writers to something approaching their pre-war representation on American publishers' lists. For whatever it's worth, I note that eight of the sixteen titles listed above (and chosen without thought of nationality) were written by citizens of the Empire — as against four out of a similar total a year ago.

Several ventures into what may be termed the higher criticism enlivened the season. *Chimera*, one of the better "little mags," devoted its Summer issue to intellectual explorations of the past, present, and future implications of the whodunit by such transatlantic observers as Ruthven Todd, Donat O'Donnell, G. Robert Stange, Patrick Quentin, José Montesinos, Hector Hoppin, Roger Callois, and Jacques Barzun. The last named also earned gratitude for his survey of current mystery fiction in his *Harper's* review department for August. While I can't help feeling that Mr. Barzun is too rigidly the traditionalist in his approach to the modern

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whodunit, his cogent and professional criticism is valuable and all too rare in the vale of crime; I recommend especially his remarks on the growing pains of the suspense school. (Incidentally, responsible American mystery criticism suffered a body blow with the departure of Anthony Boucher from the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the Fall, after five years of distinguished service.)

Also recommended for your critical shelf: Harrison Smith's "The New Detectives" in *Good Housekeeping* for September; the five concluding essays in Dorothy Sayers' UNPOPULAR OPINIONS (Harcourt), including the brilliant "Aristotle and Detective Fiction." But for the year's profoundest single utterance on the subject I give you this by Professor Thomas Hayes Procter in the *Wellesley Magazine:* "The detective story may be defined as any story that . . . deals with one or more of these questions: Whodunit (this, by the way, is really ungrammatical and should be Who did it) . . ."

Glancing over my notes for the last third of 1947, I am struck again by the cleavage of the so-called suspense novel into (*a*) quality writing and (*b*) cheesecake. (The latter allusion is journalistic, not culinary.) Both groups, of course, had degrees of excellence and badness. Close behind Lustgarten and Hughes (see above) among the do-gooders, I would list David Goodis' NIGHTFALL (Messner), about the fugitive, the honest cop, and the girl, told with effective restraint. Of several attempts at detection-by-psychiatry, I've liked best Hannah Lees' THE DARK DEVICE (Harper). To a large extent Miss Lees owes her success to her good sense in dividing the detection between the analyst and a more mundane but necessary legman. So EVIL MY LOVE (Harper) turns Joseph Shearing's accomplished attention to the Bravo case, but the reconstruction somehow lacks this fine author's usual power. Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's THE BLANK WALL (S. & S.) is best comprehended if approached as a modern fairy tale, in which a Celtic con man plays godmother to a sorely beset little hausfrau; though appealing, it is not Mrs. Holding at her most convincing. Another inventive tale requiring "suspension of belief" (and worth it in my opinion) is THE SUGARPLUM STAIRCASE by Richard English (S. & S.). If he can harness his Pegasus, here is an author to watch.

As examples of cheesecake, or hyped-up suspense, I nominate Robert Bloch's THE SCARF (Dial), Matthew Head's THE ACCOMPLICE (S. & S.), Julius Fast's WALK IN SHADOW (Rinehart), Lewis Padgett's THE DAY HE DIES (Duell), and Percy Winner's SCENE IN THE ICE-BLUE EYES (Harcourt). I have singled out these (rather than slighter and more meretricious titles) because they reveal talent which could and should be used to better purpose.

Once-lightly-over the Fall's deductive entries: among American per-

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formances I found Rex Stout's TOO MANY WOMEN (Viking) considerably livelier than last year's THE SILENT SPEAKER, but unduly abrupt at the end. On the anodyne side, you should enjoy Elizabeth Daly's nicely knit NIGHT WALK (Rinehart) and Gina Dessart's reflective A MAN DIED HERE (Harper) — though the latter was billed by the publishers as suspense. That the Red Badge Prize has ever gone to a sorrier contestant than Helen Steers' mixture of H.I.B.K. and coy young marriage in DEATH WILL FIND ME (Dodd) seems to me a matter for reasonable doubt. If you *must* have farce with your sleuthing, try Jack Iams' GIRL MEETS BODY (Morrow), Beverley Bowie's OPERATION BUGHOUSE (Dodd), or Robert Terrall's MADAM IS DEAD (Duell), but don't set your expectations too high. Standard brand Americana: THE CASE OF THE LAZY LOVER by Erle Stanley Gardner (Morrow); FASHIONED FOR MURDER by George Harmon Coxe (Knopf); THE FOURTH LETTER by Frank Gruber (Rinehart); FOOLS DIE ON FRIDAY by A. A. Fair (Morrow); MEMORY OF MURDER by Hugh Pentecost (Ziff). Hands across the sea: remembering the days when H. C. Bailey's style was one of the ornaments of British detection, his pedestrian HONOUR AMONG THIEVES (Crime Club) must be set down as a sad disappointment; in NIGHT OF ERRORS (Dodd), Michael Innes' fantasy is less insistently labored than in some of his recent efforts, but the novel remains still a far cry from his pre-war best; THE VOICE OF THE CORPSE (Farrar & Straus) by Max Murray discloses a pleasant new talent which should improve with experience.

Among the anthologies, comparison of Ellery Queen's annual QUEEN'S AWARDS: 1947 (Little) with last year's volume suggests that the modern short 'tec may be looking up. I also approve E.Q.'s critical notes following rather than preceding the selections. A curious autumnal trend (in two senses) was the heavy anthological emphasis on "period" crime, both fictional and real-life. In this classification belong Edward Wagenknecht's MURDER BY GASLIGHT (Prentice-Hall), a stunning assemblage of three Victorian novels and two plays; and, in shorter form, Lillian de la Torre's VILLAINY DETECTED (Appleton), Milton Crane's SINS OF NEW YORK (Boni & Gaer), and Richard Barker's THE FATAL CARESS (Duell), all worth antiquarian attention. Alfred Hitchcock's FIRESIDE BOOK OF SUSPENSE (S. & S.), of course, carries its own cachet. In conclusion let me recommend for your diversion these winter nights IT'S A CRIME! (Arco), compiled by Ted Cott and William and David Manners, a delightful, encyclopedic information-please-of-crime which no dyed in the wool fan should be without.

Marginalia: This department's vote for best crime-mystery film of 1947 goes to "Boomerang" for its fine blending of realism and idealism, documentation and drama. . . . Close

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second: "Kiss of Death". . . . Best performance: Alastair Sim as Inspector Cockrill in "Green for Danger". . . . In Memoriam, 1947: Baroness Orczy, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Robert Finnegan, Frederick Irving Anderson. . . . Members of the San Francisco chapter of Mystery Writers of America at work on a cooperative mystery novel. . . . Sign of the times: Ziff-Davis' mystery department has folded. . . . Mystery lookalikes: Albert Campion and Henry Gamadge; Dashiell Hammett and Percival Wilde. . . . Dutton's whodunit colophon proclaims Guilt Edged Mysteries. How's that again? . . . Marie Rodell quits as Duell, Sloan & Pearce mystery editor, after nine notable years. . . . Here's hoping neither she nor the Bloodhound will be lost to the mystery field, which needs them both. . . . Helen McCloy changing publishers; Random House will publish her new novel, first in three years, this Spring. . . . Go-climb-a-tree department: according to the American Library Association *Bulletin*, inmates of Eastern Penitentiary, Pa., may no longer read whodunits. "A grand jury felt that the books might give prisoners new ideas for crime."

Names in the news: in London, English publishers discovered that passages from Chandler, Hammett, and Latimer had been reproduced "almost verbatim" in the works of one Rene Raymond — known to the public under the pseudonyms of James Hadley Chase, Raymond Marshall, and Ambrose Grant. . . . Confronted with the evidence, Chase-Marshall-Grant-Raymond (according to *The Bookseller*) "promptly admitted his error," apologized to the authors concerned, offered to rewrite the offending passages, defrayed solicitors' costs. . . . In California, recalling Conan Doyle's intervention in the Slater and Edalji cases, Erle Stanley Gardner's analysis of the evidence in the murder conviction of sharecropper William Lindley led Governor Earl Warren to commute the death sentence. . . . Gardner is pressing for a full pardon. . . . Samuel Shellabarger once wrote whodunits as John Esteven. . . . George Antheil as Stacy Bishop. . . . D. W. Brogan as Maurice Barrington. . . . Thomas W. Duncan under his own name. . . . (And Mrs. D. is Carolyn Thomas). . . . Thomas Kyd is a well known American Elizabethan scholar.

More pseudonyma: Charles L. Leonard is M (ary) V (iolet) Heberden. . . . Roger Bax is Paul Winterton. . . . Garth Hale is A. B. Cunningham. . . . R. T. Campbell is Ruthven Todd. . . . Carol Carnac is E. C. R. Lorac (and both are Edith Caroline Rivett). . . . Hilda Lawrence was born Hildegarde Kronmiller. . . . Pat McGerr is Patricia — and photogenic too.

Yours for fewer and better mysteries in 1948!

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THE RIDDLE OF THE TIRED BULLET

by STUART PALMER

"OOPS, EXCUSE ME!" Like a ruffled Buff Orpington, Miss Hildegarde Withers backed hastly out of the Inspector's private office, where she had just surprised him in the embrace of a pretty red-head.

The spinster schoolma'am was deeply engrossed in a study of some old "Wanted for Murder" posters on the wall when Oscar Piper finally emerged to usher his fair visitor toward the corridor. She was thanking him effusively in a weak, brave voice. "And I'll take your advice, Inspector."

When the tap of her heels had died away, the Inspector came back toward Miss Withers, mopping his brow sheepishly. "Women!" he sighed.

Her sniff was pointed. "And at your age, too."

"And why not?" His Irish flared up. "You're jealous, maybe?"

"For some years," the schoolteacher told him gently, "my interest in you has been purely academic. I barely noticed the woman, except to see that she has suspiciously red-brown hair and that she was wearing a last-year's suit made over at home. Not exactly young, but still pretty if you like the type." Miss Withers paused for breath, and then noticed that the Inspector had turned back into his inner office. She rushed after him so fast that her hat, which resembled a bon-voyage basket a day after sailing, slid rakishly over one eye. "Wait, Oscar! Is it a new murder case?"

Oscar Piper poked painstakingly through his ashtray for a cigar butt recent enough to bear relighting. "Not yet it isn't," he admitted. "But the little lady was crying on my shoulder because she thinks she's going to be a widow.

"Something she dreamed, no doubt. Or is it astrology?"

"More to it than that. I had to agree with her that Ernest Hawkins is The Man of the Week Most Likely to Decorate a Marble Slab. Don't you recognize the name? Well, you'll be hearing more about him. Hawkins was secretary to old Amos Bigelow, ex-Senator Bigelow, of the Bigelow Buddy Fund Committee."

"But of course. They set out to raise money to send packages to the men in the armed forces, during the last year of the war. I was even asked to help them solicit, but the Grey Ladies work took up my spare time."

"Just as well. The Committee never got around to announcing how many packages ever got to the boys in uniform. The grand jury started to investigate them last week, and Hawkins blew the lid off when he promised to testify, under a promise of personal immunity.

"A tattle-tale, eh?"

"None of your brats down at P.S.

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38 are in his class, though. He did the stool-pigeon act up brown, dragging in a lot of supposedly important citizens. He also admitted that fifteen or twenty thousand dollars of the money stuck to his own fingers, but he claims he dribbled it away in the night clubs and gambling."

"Fast women and slow horses, no doubt?"

"Yeh. He even named the bookie who took his bets, so now a tough Broadway character known as Track-odds Louie is out of business and under indictment. Which makes a sizable group of people who would like to cut Mr. Hawkins's throat."

"Oscar, something must be done at once!" Miss Withers nodded. "Think of his poor little wife."

"You think of her. Rena ought to be able to take care of herself — she used to be a tap-dancer around the 52nd Street spots before she married Hawkins and settled down. I told her that she ought to go home and look up a good private detective agency in the phone book if she wanted protection — the homicide bureau is only interested in murders after they've happened."

Miss Withers stood up suddenly. "But Oscar, you're like a doctor who doesn't try to cure his patient because he's so interested in how the autopsy comes out!"

"Now, my dear Hildegarde —"

"I'm not your dear anything. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll break our date for dinner and the movies tonight. I prefer the company of my tank full of tropical fish — they're so much warmer-blooded!" And she flounced out of the office.

In spite of what she had said, Miss Withers had no time for her aquarium and its miniature jeweled fish that evening. She dined very sketchily on what she would have called "cold nothings" out of the refrigerator, and then went out to sit through most of a double feature. But somehow between her and the screen drama there kept popping up the figure of little Rena Hawkins, who knew that her husband was going to be killed. "It's as bad as King Charles' head," Miss Withers murmured. The woman beside her turned blankly. "*David Copperfield*, by Dickens," the schoolteacher explained, and then fled in the midst of a chorus of annoyed hisses.

It was after ten o'clock, and she knew that she ought to go home and mind her own business. But somehow she was impelled to hurry through the drizzling rain to the nearest telephone booth, and then down into the bowels of the subway.

The house, when she finally located it on the wrong street in the wrong part of Queens, was a narrow three-story brick, stuck between a chain grocery and a used-car lot. It was dark and quiet, so quiet that the ringing of the doorbell under her thumb made the schoolteacher jump. But nobody answered, in spite of her repeated ringing.

Miss Withers went down the steps, hesitated a moment, and then picked her way back toward the alley, past

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the rusting heaps of unsold and unsaleable automobiles. From the rear the residence of the Hawkins family was even less attractive than from the front, and she paused to thank her lucky stars that she had never been inveigled, in her early days, into matrimony and a life amid these drab surroundings.

There was however one sign of life here — from a third floor window a lace curtain fluttered in the breeze and a soft light was shining. Someone must be at home, after all. Well, she had come miles and miles to bring aid and friendly counsel to a fellow human being in desperate straits, and she was determined to make delivery.

She turned in through the creaking back gate, past the looming bulk of ashcans, garbage containers, abandoned summer furniture and sagging clothes-lines. The rain splattered on rusting tin and there were other sounds, like soft scurrying feet, which she tried not to hear. Hurrying a little, Miss Withers went up the steps and knocked on the door. There was no answer, nor had she expected any. Neither had she expected the door to swing silently inward.

In a way it was an invitation, like the bottle in *Alice* with the label on it that said "Drink Me." So she entered on tiptoe, and then jumped as the door closed quickly behind her. The beam of a flashlight caught and held her impaled. "Hel-lo!" cried a man's high nervous tenor. Then the kitchen light was turned on, and she blinked at a beefy, curly-haired man in his shirt-sleeves and stocking feet, an athlete just beginning to run to fat. There was the strap of a shoulder holster across his chest, and in his fist a business-like revolver. He looked jittery, competent, and — finally, puzzled.

Miss Withers heard her voice, breathlessly explaining that she had only come with the best of intentions and that if he would only dial Headquarters instead of shooting, why somebody would vouch for her, and if he himself was Mr. Hawkins then —

The man with the gun relaxed just a little. "Mr. Hawkins is asleep upstairs," he said, in a tone which plainly indicated that all other respectable citizens should be likewise. "And so is his missus. My name is Johnny Brannigan, from the Onyx Agency on Fourteenth Street."

"A private eye!" she cried impulsively.

"A *what*?" Brannigan stared at his prisoner with growing distaste. "Lady, you got a bad case of too many movie thrillers. I'm just an ex-cop that got out of the Marines a couple months ago and come back to help start up a new private agency. My job is to see nothing happens to Ernest Hawkins."

"I'm sure you are competent, but —" Miss Withers shook her head. "I learned about the situation quite by accident and got so worried that I just couldn't stay away. But nobody answered the door —"

He sighed. "Lady, would you answer a doorbell if you were in my shoes?" He caught her glance, and

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flushed slightly. "Anyway, I heard you out front. I heard you coming around to the back, so I left the door open and got ready —"

"So I see. And now that I'm here, could I have a word with Mr. Hawkins?"

"They both turned in for the night, lady. It's almost eleven o'clock, and I got orders not to bother them. They're paying me fifteen bucks a day and expenses to carry out orders."

"Of course. But —"

"Look," said Brannigan, with sarcastic patience. "Let's settle it this way. You leave me do my job, and you get back on your broomstick and fly away home, huh?" He held the door invitingly open.

She had no choice but to flounce out into the night and the rain, angry as a boil. But the anger was mostly at herself, for getting into a ridiculous situation. "Men!" she muttered, as she picked her way toward the alley. Then all of a sudden the night exploded, and she was paralyzed by a blinding light and a racking roar of sound, which turned out to be nothing more than a suburban train swinging around the curve of the railway embankment, which bordered the alley on the far side, a dike of dirt and cinders as high as the telephone poles.

"My nerves!" protested Miss Withers. Then she stopped, and looked up at that lighted window. It was odd that a frightened man would lie in a room with an open window and a fluttering curtain. The curtain must be soaked with rain, too. The schoolteacher took a deep breath and then began to pick her way up the steep side of the embankment, at considerable damage to her dignity, her shoes, and her gloves. But she finally made it, and then turned to look directly into the lighted window. She stood still for a long moment, and then started headlong down . . .

Across the street from Headquarters stands the Criminal Courts Building, one wing of which is devoted to the activities of the District Attorney. In a reception room, furnished with uncomfortable modern chairs and decorated with photographs of municipal projects, six people were waiting — six nervous, unhappy persons guarded by an impersonal policeman.

Though the members of the group did not know it, they were at the moment being carefully studied through a one-way mirror set in the wall of Assistant D.A. Tom Minor's office. Minor himself was uneasier than any of them. "I still think we've overplayed our hand," he was saying. "These people are big shots, and they can make a lot of trouble."

"I'm used to trouble," Inspector Piper told him. "Who is which?"

"The old man with the jowls and the flowing hair is ex-Senator Bigelow, professional do-gooder. The hag in mink and pearls is the actress, Maylah Raymond, who used to have Diamond Jim Brady drink orange juice out of her slipper back when she was the toast of Broadway. The fat

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man in tweeds, is General Hector Fleming, National Guard, formerly a famous armchair hero. The tall guy with the lovely gray toupee is Waldemar Hull, world-traveler, author, and lecturer at women's clubs. Facing him is Matthew Gruber, used to be legal counsel for the Watch and Ward Society up in Boston. They say he has the world's finest collection of pornography. That's the entire Bigelow Committee. . . . ."

"What about the head-waiter with the big cigar, sitting all by himself?"

"Louis Margolis, the bookmaker. They say he has twenty dinner jackets."

"He may trade 'em for prison gray," Piper said. "Well, Tom, which is your candidate? Who looks like a potential murderer?"

Minor hesitated. "Well, now, Inspector . . . . this was your idea, not ours."

"Okay." Piper looked at his watch. "Five of eleven. Not bad work, considering the order to pick 'em up didn't go out until ten. Come on, let's give 'em the business."

A moment later they faced the group and Tom Minor cleared his throat apologetically. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began. "You have been asked to come down here —"

"'Asked!" shrieked Maylah Raymond. "I was dragged!"

Minor held up his hand. "—to come down here in connection with certain threats said to have been made against the life of one Ernest Hawkins." Behind him the door opened and a uniformed man came in to hand a teletype to Piper, but the Assistant D.A. did not notice it. "You will be allowed to return home very shortly, as soon as you have put up a peace bond. But first I want to introduce you to a gentleman who has a few words to say. Inspector Oscar Piper, of homicide. . . . ."

Minor paused, and waved his hand. He felt a crumpled sheet of paper shoved into his sweating fingers, and heard the door slam. Then he too read the message, and gulped. "The — the Inspector asks me to apologize for him," he continued automatically. "He's just been called to take over the investigation into the murder of Ernest Hawkins. *Hawkins!*" he repeated, staring blankly at the six people who had every reason in the world to want that name on a tombstone. And they all stared back at him. Somebody in the room — was it Margolis the bookmaker? — let go a long, heartfelt sigh.

By the time the Inspector reached the Hawkins house, the complex machinery of homicide investigation was already whirring. The place was blazing with lights, and everywhere detectives, uniformed officers, ballistics, fingerprint and cameramen scurried like ants in a disturbed ant-hill. It was a picture to bring satisfaction to the heart of any homicide squad skipper, with only one jarring note — the gaunt and unhappy figure which rose to greet him on the front porch.

"Oscar!" cried Miss Hildegarde Withers. "They won't even let me in-

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side, and I'm the one who discovered the body!"

He blinked at her. "But how —"

"I just happened to be climbing the railroad embankment across the alley from the rear of the house, so I could take a peak into the third floor bedroom window. I looked in and saw a man lying in bed, under a reading-lamp. Only he wasn't reading at all — his face was covered with blood Quite dead, I could see that. So I turned in the alarm."

She followed him inside, still talking about her adventures of the evening. "Wait here, will you?" he said finally, and left her. When he returned his face was very grave. "The body —?" she began hopefully.

"Dr. Gavin, the Assistant Medical Examiner, is upstairs now," Piper said. "If he needs your help he'll send for you."

"But Oscar —"

"This case has been a headache from the very beginning," he snapped. "Come with me." And Miss Withers found herself hustled unceremoniously into the living room, where Mr. Brannigan, the private detective, was sweating copiously under the stern gaze of a Headquarters sergeant. On the couch lay Rena Hawkins, her reddish hair disheveled and her eyes looking like two burnt holes in a blanket. She wore a man's woolen bathrobe.

"Oh, it's you " the woman cried, when she saw the Inspector. Her voice was thin and brittle. "Didn't I tell you so? Didn't I beg you to do something? You and your advice to go look up a good private detective — as if this clumsy ox was any protection —" She gave the private detective a look that could have curled his hair.

"Hold it," Piper said. "Brannigan, according to your story somebody tried to sneak into the house last night just before eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir." Brannigan pointed accusingly toward Miss Withers. "It was *her*. I figured she was just a harmless nut, so I let her go."

"Why, of all things, when I was merely trying —" Miss Withers was gasping. "How *dare* you say that?"

"Okay, okay, I'll ask the questions," Piper said wearily. "Brannigan, after you got rid of the lady, what next?"

"I began to worry about Mr. Hawkins. I tiptoed upstairs to see if he was all right, and there was a streak of light under his door. Only he didn't answer my knock. I went and tried to wake up his wife, only she was dead to the world. I got really worried then, because he was locked in and I didn't have a key. So I kicked in a panel of the door, and there he was, stiffer'n a mackerel. It looked like a .45 calibre hole in his head."

"The Medical Examiner bears that out. What did you do next?"

"Me? I went downstairs to let the police radio car boys in, before they smashed the door down. Somebody already called 'em . . ."

"What was the last time you saw Hawkins alive?"

Brannigan frowned. "Shortly after I got on the job, about nine-thirty, when he went up to bed."

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"And you stick to your story that you didn't hear the shot?"

"Not even a loud noise. Nothing."

"How do you account for a man in this house being killed with a large-caliber pistol and you not hearing it?"

The man shook his head miserably. "Honest, Inspector, I don't."

Piper's face wore an expression of deep disgust, but he turned quickly to Rena Hawkins. "Well, are you deaf too?"

She was dry-eyed, but Miss Withers thought the woman not far from hysteria. "I didn't hear a thing," Rena said dully. "But there were two doors between me and Ernest. I was in our regular bedroom on the second floor front. You see, I just had to get some sleep, and Ernest has been tossing around so much at night, I made him go upstairs to the spare bedroom where he could lock himself in."

Miss Withers whispered in the Inspector's ear. "Oscar, I have an idea! Suppose we make a test — I'll lie down in Mrs. Hawkins' bedroom and you close the doors and then fire off a pistol in the murder room, to see if I can hear it?"

He was unimpressed. "No good, unless we had the same gun."

"Oh, yes!" said the schoolteacher happily. "*The same gun!* I wonder if it could have been the weapon Mr. Brannigan was waving in my face earlier this evening? He wore one of those gangster strap things around his shoulder. . . ."

The private operative flushed beet-red. "Ask Sergeant Mertz about that," he said sulkily.

"Sure," said the sergeant. "We took the roscoe off him when we got here. Ballistics has it now, but I can tell you beforehand that it's a new .38, never fired, and too small for the hole in Hawkins's head."

Rena Hawkins said, through dry lips: "There wouldn't be any use in the test of whether I heard the shot or not, unless Miss Whatshername here took a couple of stiff slugs of whisky and a double dose of veronal, like I did when I went to bed last night."

"She was still groggy when we got here," Mertz put in. "The radio car boys say they had to pour water on her to wake her up."

"Okay for now," the Inspector said. Rena Hawkins subsided upon the couch, biting her handkerchief, but Brannigan stood up hopefully. At the look in Piper's face he sat down again. Miss Withers felt herself impelled out into the hall.

"Oscar," she cried hopefully, "I have another idea! Couldn't somebody have sneaked into the house and picked the lock of Hawkins's bedroom, or else climbed up to the window on a ladder and then shot him using a silencer?"

Piper shook his head wearily. "A silencer is no damn good except on a rifle, though the general public doesn't know it. Moreover, there's a Yale-type lock on the bedroom door, practically unpickable. No ladder marks in the soft mud of the yard, either."

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She shrugged, "Well, I was only trying —"

"Trying to make a mystery out of what must be a simple inside job. That Brannigan fellow is lying like a rug. Only —"

"Only why should an ex-policeman, with so much experience along these lines, and with intelligence enough to start his own detective agency when he left the service, tell such an obvious lie?"

It was close enough to nettle the Inspector. "Maybe——"

"And with all those people on the Bigelow Committee wanting Hawkins dead —"

Wearily the Inspector gave a résumé of his evening. "I was only trying to follow your suggestions," he said. "Preventive detection, and all that. But we can cancel out the lot of them. Dr. Gavin says that Hawkins died shortly after ten. None of the suspects could have been out here murdering Hawkins and got home in time to be picked up when the order went out. So forget it."

"But Oscar," she cried. "There must be some mistake . . ."

"You're making it," he snapped. "Nobody asked you to come out here and solve the mystery of the locked room. You're off base. Suppose you just sit here a while and let men do men's work, huh?" He pointed to the bench, and hurried upstairs again.

When the Inspector finally came back downstairs, he found her studying the pile of tattered phone books on the bench. His mood, she sensed, had mysteriously improved. "Trying to look up the answers in the back of the book, Hildegarde?"

"Not quite. But I did have an idea. Only none of the suspects seems to live out here on Long Island. Of course, these phone books are a year old. They're titled *Summer-Fall 1946*, and people might have moved."

"So what?"

"The murder was committed between nine-forty, when he went to bed, and a little after eleven, when I first saw the body. The Medical Examiner says shortly after ten. Suppose the killer lived only a few minutes from here — he could have still got home in time to be picked up. Maybe he was laughing up his sleeve, or quaking in his boots, down in the District Attorney's office?"

"Relax," Piper told her. "They all live in Manhattan. But we're way ahead of you. Now that the case is all over but the shouting, come on up and I'll show you how it was done."

"And by whom?"

"That part'll be easy. You see, Dr. Gavin says Hawkins was killed by a .45 bullet that only went an inch or so into his brain."

" 'Not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough',' she quoted. "Shakespeare."

"You don't get the point. The shot couldn't possibly have been fired in the bedroom at all, or it would have gone through him and buried itself in the wall. A gun that size can put a bullet through four inches of hardwood. The slug that killed him was a

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spent bullet, just about at the limit of its effective range." They came to the third floor and along the hall, through the door with the smashed panel and into the room where at the moment Ernest Hawkins was posing for his last photographs. Miss Withers took another look at the lifeless, sagging body, one hand still loosely holding a copy of Turf and Paddock Magazine, sniffed at the empty brandy bottle on the bedside table, and then turned quickly away. It was a relief to rejoin the Inspector, who was pointing out the window.

"Nobody heard the shot," he said, "because it wasn't fired inside the house. What noise there was was drowned out by the roar of a passing train. You see that the embankment is almost at this level? The eastbound trains go by like a bat out of hell, but the ones headed toward Manhattan have to slow down along here for a signal block ahead. The killer must have been standing on the rear platform, where he'd be alone. Luck was with him — it was a good two hundred and fifty feet, but you yourself know how the open window and the bed-lamp made a target out of the victim. And if the shot had only winged Hawkins, it would still have scared him out of testifying at the trial."

Miss Withers admitted all that. She had more to say, but the Inspector was suddenly called downstairs to the phone. A few moments later he came back up the stairs, his face wreathed in a wide grin. At the landing he stopped, frowned, and then turned back and went into Rena Hawkins's bedroom, where he surprised Miss Withers poking around among the boxes and bottles on the vanity table.

"Look, Oscar," she cried, displaying a sphinx-marked box. "She does use henna!"

"Okay. So you were right about one thing, anyway! But you have no business to go snooping around. What do you suppose you could find that we didn't notice when we officially searched the place, huh?"

She hesitated. "Sometimes I think that the police only see the things that are there, instead of noticing the things that should be and aren't." She gestured, vaguely.

The Inspector looked at the bottles and jars on the vanity. "Looks like ordinary dime store stuff to me."

But Miss Withers had turned her attention to the heavy, steel money-box on the bureau. "Oh, if that's it, I've got the key," Piper said. "Wanta peek?" He opened it, dumping out a sheaf of old pari-mutuel tickets. "Proving that Hawkins made some very unlucky fifty dollar bets when he went to the track. Probably saved them so he could prove his losses against his gains, for the income-tax people."

With feminine contrariness, Miss Withers had lost interest in the strong box and was peering into the closet. "Bedroom slippers, three pairs of oxfords, a pair of opera pumps run down at the heel, and one pair of overshoes," she enumerated.

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"No Seven-League boots?"

"I was thinking," Miss Withers announced cryptically, "of glass slippers — the kind that Cinderella wore to the ball."

The Inspector said he had had enough of fairy stories and urged her toward the door. "I've got work to do," he said.

"You have your work cut out for you, if you're going to try to prove that theory about the shot being fired from a train," she insisted. "I've been thinking it over and —"

"And the shot that killed Hawkins was fired from a westbound train which passed this point at exactly ten-five p.m.," he told her.

"Just got a report that a maintenance man in the Pennsy yards stumbled on a .45 automatic, recently fired, one shell gone, on the rear platform of a suburban train that ended its last run at ten-fourteen. I'll bet you all the tea in China that the slug in Hawkins's head fits that gun."

Miss Withers was opposed to betting. "I don't see why you're so elated, Oscar. That puts us right back where we started. Because any of the suspects could have been aboard that train, perhaps as a round-trip passenger, and still have had time enough to get home to his residence anywhere in midtown Manhattan and be picked up by your detectives at ten-forty or before. It re-opens the case —"

"Sure. But now we've got some things to work on. We've washed out the possibility of an inside job. The shot was fired from outside, and neither Brannigan nor Rena were outside last night, because I personally looked for traces of mud on their shoes. We've got the murder gun and we'll start checking it. We know the killer was a good shot, and that he was on that train. We'll have men check with every ticket-seller, every conductor, every taxi driver. . . ."

"It sounds like a lot of trouble," she said. "But I've noticed that nothing is too much trouble for the Department — *after* a murder is committed. Except to sit down quietly and think about things."

He grinned. "You mean the things that aren't there?"

"Perhaps I do. Oscar, are you still holding the members of the Bigelow Committee?"

"Only for the nitrate test. And the killer was probably smart enough to hold the gun with a glove and then toss it overboard immediately after the shot. First thing in the morning we'll comb the right of way, naturally."

"Naturally." Miss Withers started down the stair. "Oscar, will you excuse me? I hate to remind you, but it'll be daylight soon."

"Huh? So it will. Come on." They came down into the lower hall of the Hawkins house. Miss Withers peered into the living room, where Rena Hawkins was alone, sleeping sprawled out on the couch and snoring faintly.

Miss Withers gently drew the dressing gown over the woman's knees and turned out the glaring overhead light. "I suppose you have already re-

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leased Mr. Brannigan?" she asked.

"Sure. He was glad to get out of it, even if she wouldn't give him his pay for the job. Last thing he said was that he thought he'd try to get back on the Force, and I'll help him." Piper turned. "Hey, Sam!" After a short wait Sergeant Mertz came toward them from the kitchen, wiping his mouth. "Sam, will you be a good guy and run Miss Withers home? She has to teach geography to a bunch of little hoodlums tomorrow."

"Sure!" the sergeant said. "Glad to."

"Thank you," said the schoolteacher. "But it's just that I want to get away from all this confusion to some place where it's quiet." And she stalked out of the door.

Promptly at nine o'clock next morning Miss Hildegarde Withers accepted the two red apples which were her day's offering, and then called to attention her third grade class at P.S. 38. At nine-ten the last of her pupils disappeared down the hall, headed for an unexpected half-holiday. "'All work and no play,'" she said to herself, and reached for her hat again.

But it was rising noon when she walked into the office of her old friend and sparring-partner, to find the Inspector taking aspirin and chasing it with black coffee out of a paper cup. "Oscar!" she cried. "I just dropped in to congratulate you. Because it says in the afternoon papers that the police have the Hawkins case well in hand and an arrest is expected any moment!"

"Don't rub it in," he said bitterly. "As you very well know, that's the standard press handout when we are completely up a tree."

"Dear me! You mean to tell me that even with the entire Bigelow Committee as ready-made suspects, you haven't arrested anybody? Do they all have perfect alibis?"

Slowly Piper shook his head. "Worse than that. They don't have any alibis that you can check. They all had motive and opportunity — at least opportunity to be aboard that train, though the railroad employees don't seem to be able to identify anybody. We've more or less narrowed it down to General Fleming, Waldemar Hull, and Track-odds Louie, just because an army officer, an explorer, and a gambler should each have had some experience with firearms. But they all deny it. No luck tracing the pistol, either — it was listed as stolen eleven years ago."

"How sad," she murmured, "to have the wonderful, efficient, infallible detective machinery bog down."

"We found the glove, anyway!" he blurted out. "On the right of way, not fifty feet from the Hawkins house. Only —"

"Only it was probably cheap cotton, untraceable, and large enough to fit any suspect, man or woman?"

Piper nodded, his shoulders sagging. "I guess that was to be expected." Then he cocked his head, suspiciously. "All right, why are you needling me this way? What are you up to?"

"I? Why, nothing at all. I just gave

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my pupils a half-holiday this morning, so I could play hookey. I made several phone calls, too. One of them was to the Onyx Agency, after I first got the number from Information. Mr. Brannigan answered the phone, and I asked if he remembered me. He said he didn't think he ever could forget, but that he would try. Very bitter, he was. But he did brighten up when I asked him to help me solve the Hawkins case, and told him my theory. . . ."

"Wait a minute," put in the Inspector testily. "Whose side are you on?"

"I am," she said, "interested only in getting at the truth, through any available door. That was why I made another phone call this morning — to Mr. Margolis, the bookmaker. Did it ever occur to anybody to ask just how much money the late Mr. Hawkins lost playing the races?"

"No, and I don't give a hoot."

"But you should. I did ask, and I found that Hawkins didn't lose — he won. Thousands and thousands of dollaws. The devil takes care of his own, they say. Anyway, his winnings must have constituted the money that was in the strong-box in the Hawkins bedroom, before the murderer took it and substituted old pari-mutuel tickets. There had to be something for you to find inside."

"So what?" Patience had never been the Inspector's long suit. "Will you get to the point of all this, if there is any point?"

"By all means. I made still another phone call — to Rena Hawkins. I wanted to ask her who it was that suggested the Onyx Agency to her."

"She said she looked it up in the phone book —" Piper began.

"I know she said that. But the phone book was put out a year before the agency was opened. I wanted to ask Rena if maybe she hadn't known Brannigan when she was a dancer around the hot-spots, and when he was a policeman assigned to the Times Square area. In fact, I did ask her, but she only hung up on me."

The Inspector was rigid. "Brannigan!" he whispered.

"An inside job," Miss Withers agreed. "And you have no idea just how much of an inside job it was."

Piper wasn't listening. "Brannigan," he said again. "Somebody got to him, hired him to do the job. Why, that ——"

"We really ought to make Mrs. Hawkins answer the question," Miss Withers suggested again. "Perhaps if we went out there. . . ?"

"Never mind that. *Brannigan* — and you actually phoned him and tipped him off?" Without waiting for an answer the Inspector pressed the switch of the inter-office communicator, roaring orders to pick up Thomas Brannigan on a charge of murder.

It was some time before Miss Withers could repeat her request for a trip out to Queens. "That can wait," Piper told her. "Lucky thing we've got a man stationed in the Hawkins house." He reached for the phone, and dialed a number.

"No answer?" Miss Withers nodded. "It doesn't surprise me at all." The

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Inspector grabbed his hat and headed out of the office, but she kept close behind him. The departmental sedan, siren screaming, cut across the bridge and eastward into the depths of Queens County. During a lull Miss Withers said gently. "Oscar, if you shot somebody from the rear platform of a train what would you do with the gun? Would you put it down gently beside you, or would you hurl it as far as you could? Also, why couldn't the gun have been tossed onto the train, by someone standing on the embankment out in back?"

He didn't answer. Finally they drew up before the Hawkins house and for a while everything was confusion. The door had to be forced and then they found the policeman on duty there. He had not left his post after all, but he lay on the kitchen floor cold as a Christmas goose, a lump on his head and a broken beer bottle beside him. Of red-haired Rena Hawkins there was no sign whatever.

The Inspector was on the phone, directing the laying of a dragnet, the complicated operations of a manhunt that would extend all over the metropolitan area of New York. "And put all available men on the railroad stations, the bus depots. . ."

Miss Withers plucked at his sleeve; but he jerked away angrily. "You and your meddling," he growled.

"Shh," she whispered. "Watch your language. Little pitchers, you know ——"

He suddenly realized that she had brought a veritable horde of small boys into the house with her, thirty or more round little faces staring at him, smiling through missing teeth, breathing heavily. . . .

"My class," she explained. "But Oscar, before you hang up, I suggest that you forget about the stations and the airports and look for a 1931 gray Maxwell coupé, probably headed south for Mexico."

He only stared at her.

"You see," she hastily went on, "while you were running around in circles in here I went out and had a chat with the nice man who runs the used car lot next door. I had noticed that one car that was there last night was missing now, and it occurred to me that if somebody was in a hurry to hide some money last night, in a safe place *outside* the house. . . ."

"Are you saying Rena stole the car?"

"Oh, no. The man said it was sold over the phone this morning, to a Mr. Smith. It's being delivered to him out in Jersey City right this minute — the buyer promised to pay cash and I wonder if perhaps he doesn't plan to pay it out of the money that was stuffed under the cushions or somewhere last night just after the murder was committed?"

The Inspector was already giving quick orders over the telephone, orders that were eventually to result in the New Jersey state police swooping down on their motorcycles to pick up Brannigan and Rena Hawkins before they had even had their first flat tire. Which was a good thing, because there was no air in the spare tire —

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only eighteen thousand dollars, in a neat package.

"They're guilty all right," the Inspector was saying. "But we've no valid case against them. Because neither one of them left the house last night, to fire the shot or to stash the money. I checked their shoes —"

"Feet," pointed out Miss Withers, "were made before shoes. I mean bare feet. And moreover, I keep trying to tell you — the shot wasn't fired from outside, either from the platform or the railroad embankment. It was fired *in the bedroom!*"

"And I keep trying to tell you," Piper shouted, "that it couldn't have happened that way, because the bullet would have gone right through Hawkins's head at close range!"

The thirty little boys still waited. Miss Withers pushed two of them forward. "Inspector, this is Sigismund and this is Walter — two of my best pupils. When I gave my class a half-holiday, I suggested that they might use their bright little eyes in searching the alley and the railroad tracks back of this house. Boys, please show the nice Inspector what you found?"

Walter nudged Sigismund, who gulped and then started to prospect in the recesses of his clothing. With some assistance the urchin finally produced a piece of oak two-by-four. "There, you see?" cried Miss Withers, in modest pride. "That will do, boys. The Inspector will reward each of you with a dollar, and everybody else gets money for ice cream."

In a daze the Inspector found himself paying off. The little boys disappeared, whooping like Comanches.

"This piece of wood," Miss Withers promised the Inspector, "is worth every cent it cost you. Do you remember saying to me that the gun which killed Hawkins could shoot through a four-inch plank? Well, it immediately occurred to me that if there actually had been a plank held against the forehead of a sleeping man, and if the muzzle of the gun were pressed tight against the plank. . . ." She gestured.

"Judas Priest in a whirlwind!" muttered the Inspector. He rubbed his thumb against the powder-blackening on one surface of the two-by-four, and then poked a finger into the hole drilled clean through the wood.

"It was a spent bullet, Oscar, just as you said — *even though it had to travel only a few inches.*"

The Inspector had to admit that she was right. He wrapped up the piece of wood in his handkerchief and put it into his pocket. "This will be Exhibit A in the case of the State of New York versus Thomas Brannigan and Rena Hawkins."

Miss Withers nodded. "Hell," she said, "hath no fury like a wife who finds that while she has been sitting home her husband has been gallivanting around the night clubs. Exhibit B should be a pair of new evening slippers."

"Huh?" Oscar Piper blinked. "What slippers?"

"The ones he never bought her," said Hildegarde Withers.

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MIDNIGHT VISIT

by ROBERT ARTHUR

AUSABLE did not fit any description of a secret agent Fowler had ever read. Following him down the musty corridor of the gloomy French hotel where Ausable had a room, Fowler felt let down. It was a small room, on the sixth and top floor, and scarcely a setting for a figure of romantic adventure. But Ausable, in his wrinkled business suit badly in need of cleaning, could hardly be called a romantic figure.

He was, for one thing, fat. Very fat. And then there was his accent. Though he spoke French and German passably, he had never altogether lost the New England twang he had brought to Paris from Boston twenty years before.

"You are disappointed," Ausable said wheezily over his shoulder. "You were told that I was a secret agent, a spy, dealing in espionage and danger. You wished to meet me because you are a writer, young and romantic. You visioned mysterious figures in the night, the crack of pistols, drugs in the wine.

"Instead, you have spent a dull evening in a French music hall with a sloppy fat man who, instead of having messages slipped into his hand by dark-eyed beauties, gets only a prosaic telephone call making an appointment in his room. You have been bored!"

The fat man chuckled to himself as he unlocked the door of his room and stood aside to let his discomfited guest enter.

"You are disillusioned," Ausable told him. "But take cheer, my young friend. Presently you will see a paper, a quite important paper for which several men have risked their lives, come to me in the next-to-the-last step of its journey into official hands. Some day soon that paper may well affect the course of history. In that thought there is drama, is there not?"

As he spoke, Ausable closed the door behind him. Then he switched on the light.

And as the light came on, Fowler had his first authentic thrill of the day. For halfway across the room, a small automatic in his hand, stood a man.

Ausable blinked a few times.

"Max," he wheezed, "you gave me a start. I thought you were in Berlin. What are you doing here in my room?"

"Max" was slender, a little less than tall, with features that suggested slightly the crafty pointed countenance of a fox. There was about him — aside from the gun — nothing especially menacing.

"The report," he murmured. "The report that is being brought you tonight on Germany's air strength. I

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thought it would be safer in my hands than in yours."

Ausable moved to an armchair and sat down heavily.

"I'm going to raise hell with the management this time, and you can bet on it," he said grimly. "The second time in a month somebody has gotten into my room off that confounded balcony!"

Fowler's eyes went to the single window of the room. It was an ordinary window, against which now the night was pressing blackly.

"Balcony?" Max said, with a rising inflection. "No, a passkey. I did not know about the balcony. It might have saved me some trouble."

"It's not my damned balcony," Ausable said with extreme irritation. "It belongs to the next apartment."

He glanced explanatorily at Fowler.

"You see," he said, "this room used to be part of a large unit, and the next room — through that door there — used to be the living room. *It* had the balcony, which extends under *my* window now.

"You can get onto it from the empty room two doors down — and somebody did, last month. The management promised me to block it off. But they haven't."

Max glanced at Fowler, who was standing stiffly a few feet from Ausable, and waved the gun with a little peremptory gesture.

"Please sit down," he suggested. "We have a wait of half an hour at least, I think."

"Thirty-one minutes," Ausable said moodily. "The appointment was for twelve-thirty. I wish I knew how you learned about that report, Max."

The other smiled without mirth.

"And we wish we knew how it was gotten out of Germany," he replied. "However, no harm has been done. I will have it back — what is that?"

Unconsciously Fowler, who was still standing, had jumped at the sudden rapping on the door. Ausable yawned.

"The gendarmes," he said. "I thought that so important a paper as the one we are waiting for might well be given a little extra protection tonight."

Max bit his lip in uncertainty. The rapping was repeated.

"What will you do now, Max?" Ausable asked. "If I do not answer, they will enter anyway. The door is unlocked. And they will not hesitate to shoot."

The man's face was black as he backed swiftly toward the window; with his hand behind him he flung it up to its full height, and swung a leg over the sill.

"Send them away!" he rasped. "I will wait on the balcony. Send them away or I'll shoot and take my chances!"

The rapping on the door came louder. And a voice was raised.

"M'sieu! M'sieu Ausable!"

Keeping his body twisted so that his gun still covered the fat man and his guest, the man at the window grasped the frame with his free hand to support himself as he rested his weight on one thigh, then swung his other leg

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up and over the sill.

The doorknob turned. Swiftly Max pushed with his left hand to free himself from the sill and drop to the balcony outside. And then, as he dropped, he screamed once, shrilly.

The door opened and a waiter stood there with a tray, a bottle and two glasses.

"M'sieu, the cognac you ordered for when you returned," he said, and set the tray upon the table, deftly uncorked the bottle, and retired.

White-faced, Fowler stared after him.

"But —" he stammered, "the police —"

"There were no police." Ausable sighed. "Only Henri, whom I was expecting."

"But won't that man —" Fowler began.

"No," Ausable said, "he won't return. There is no balcony."

"O"

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This is the story of Prince Rudolf, son of the Duke of Suiza, and of an Englishman who was a bull of a man; and of the duel of wits between them, and how both proved they could take it as well as dish it out; and of that strange familiarity you will feel about Prince Rudolf, as if you had met him before on older pages, and more than once. And indeed you have, for Prince Rudolf comes of a royal literary line. He is, we would hazard, a direct descendant of that adventurous old caliph, Haroun-al-Raschid of bygone Bagdad, and surely he is kin of Prince Florizel of Bohemia, that accomplished nobleman who also liked (in O. Henry's phrase) "to go bumming" and night-prowling. Yes, you will find this tale by Michael Arlen a new Arabian Nights Entertainment, a tale of high romance and dark crime and glittering detection. And oh, yes, there is a girl named Iris . . .

It was not long ago that we had lunch with Michael Arlen at the 21 Club. Your Editor ate little — we were too busy listening, for we are genuinely in awe of "Mike" and we marvel at the perennial charm of his person and his words, and of the mellow bite of his wit; and we realized — although it is futile to attempt an explanation of it — how stories like "Midnight Adventure" could flow from the mind of the man who was probably the first writer in English to say, in so many charming words, that there are three sexes . . .

And a further note on nomenclature: Prince Rudolf's adversary in this story is named Mr. Geraldine. Now isn't it curious that Prince Florizel's confidant and Master of the Horse was one Colonel Geraldine? And you will recall, Colonel Geraldine possessed a singular facility in disguise. Is it possible that Prince Florizel's devoted aide rose in worldly position until he became, a generation later, one of London's most famous bankers? An interesting speculation . . .

MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

by MICHAEL ARLEN

Now it is told in London how on one winter's night not long ago a gentleman who was walking from Grosvenor Square down Carlos Place was accosted by a lady in a peculiar manner and with curious results.

Earlier that same evening two gentlemen of correct appearance might have been observed dining together at a quiet corner table in the restaurant of a London hotel which is famous for the distinction of its guests. Our two friends, one lined and gray-

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haired, the other younger and lean and uncommonly handsome in a saturnine way, appeared to be absorbed in conversation.

The younger gentleman talked the least and, as was only proper, listened attentively to his gray-haired companion. This was not surprising, since the father was telling his son in the most urgent terms that only a rich marriage could appease the ferocity of their overdraft at the bank.

In days gone by, when the last King of Navarre strode into history as Henri IV, first and finest of the Bourbon Kings of France, the mountainous half of Navarre became, owing to reasons we cannot go into now, the Duchy of Suiza. The Dukes of Suiza were royal in that pathetically half-starved way which is disparagingly known as "minor." For several centuries the Duchy of Suiza was respected, or perhaps overlooked, as an independent kingdom, and eventually forgotten.

The two gentlemen at dinner were Carlos XXVII, Duke of Suiza, and his only son, Prince Rudolf. But, as the worldly father pointed out to his worldly son, high titles like Duke and Prince without the cash to support them added up to so much spinach put before a starving man.

"In short," said Duke Carlos, who liked to speak the English he had picked up from the American visitors who had thronged the Casinos of his duchy before his exile, "we are bust wide open, boy — unless you shake the Christmas tree to some effect."

Rudolf sipped his champagne with an air of saturnine fatality. "Our reputation," said he, "is enough to wither even the stoutest Christmas tree as we approach."

"You must find some sweet young innocent, Rudolf. Or haven't I already heard something about you and the American heiress, Baba Carstairs? I can only hope, my friend, that you are impressing the girl as being a romantic person — for you can *look* extremely romantic, particularly when you are telling lies."

Prince Rudolf finished the champagne in his glass. "Dear father," said he at last, "have you ever been in love?"

Duke Carlos looked at his son with pity.

"Frequently," said he. "Why, did you think you had invented love?"

"Perhaps," said the young man moodily, "I could suggest some badly-needed improvements on it."

"So you are going to tell me that you are still crazy about that Follies girl you met last year in Paris?"

"No, not last year, but ten years ago, and not a Follies girl, but a girl. But perhaps it would be better for men like us not even to think about her."

"You look so romantic when you speak of her, Rudolf, that I feel sure you told her many lies. Forget her, boy. Remember our traditions. Remember our name. Remember our overdraft. In short, remember Miss Carstairs."

Now, it is of this Prince Rudolf it is

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told that, as later that night he walked moodily to his modest lodgings in the sulky shadows behind the clubs of Piccadilly, he was accosted by a lady in a peculiar manner.

He saw a car, long and dark, of sober elegance. It passed close by him, as such cars do, with no more sound than a flick of a cat's whiskers. A few yards ahead, it stopped.

As Rudolf walked past, his moody gaze ahead, he was thinking how much better it would be for that pretty, nice, empty-headed little millionairess Baba Carstairs if a selfish brute like himself left her alone. He liked her very well, of course. But it would not have occurred to him to marry her if she had been poor.

It was at that moment that a corner of his eye was caught by something strange and bright in the cold night. It was a hand and arm alight with jewelry against the black background of the car.

"Can I drop you?" said a low voice.

Rudolf, who had been very well brought up, as regards superficial manners anyway, took off his hat to the brilliant arm, observing at the same time that the hand was slender and young and cool, like the voice.

"You are very kind," said he. "But I have only a short way to go."

"There is nothing to fear," said the cool voice.

The correct and incurious profile of the elderly chauffeur at the wheel betrayed nothing but the propriety of his employer. Rudolf, stepping closer to the open window, caught a glimpse of the lady's face within the shadows — and was lightly touched by a faint perfume that reminded him so poignantly of a past enchantment that for an instant he walked again in a garden with a slight fair girl.

Telling himself that he was a fool, he swiftly opened the door and climbed within.

"Thank you," said the lady, "for being both brave and polite."

Prince Rudolf smiled. "I fancy it is neither courage nor politeness that inspires men to do what beautiful women ask them."

He found the lady examining him with the utmost gravity.

"Height, five-eleven," he said, "hair, black; eyes, brown; one small mole on left cheek; self-confident manner; no distinctive peculiarities. . . ."

Her faint smile did not touch the gravity of her eyes, of which he had already formed a very favorable opinion. They were direct and blue, of a brilliant darkness, like the blue sea whipped by wind. The lady's hair, too, was maybe as you like it, fair and curly, but without frivolity. Rudolf, experienced in petty encounters, saw at once that only some great urgency had forced this lady to address a stranger, for she could not be corrupted by small desires.

"And I?" she said.

He noticed, but without surprise, that the car was moving. It was agreeable to find that he was not so tired of the world as he had fancied he was.

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"And I, sir?" she said. "How would you describe the stranger who has kidnaped you?"

"I like you," said Prince Rudolf.

"Dear me," said the lady, "you *are* quick."

"That's me all over," said Rudolf. "The minute I set eyes on you, I said to myself, there's a woman I like a lot."

"I hadn't an idea," said the lady, "that conversation with a stranger could be made so easy as you make it."

"You are not a stranger. I recognized you right away."

"Me? You recognized me?"

"Of course. You have never heard the old chestnut about the woman whom a man always meets too late?"

"Too late? Dear me, for what?"

"For his peace of mind, since she is usually already married."

"Since I am single, sir, your peace of mind is safe. But thank you for saying nice things about my appearance."

"Not only your appearance, madam. I have also taken a big liking to your character."

"Then you are a clairvoyant?"

"A connoisseur — a student of dreams."

"Dreams? Were we talking of dreams?"

"No, but we are going to. When men dream," said Prince Rudolf, "of that kind of happiness which is too often forbidden them owing to having married in haste, or some other silly reason, their dreams are inspired by thoughts of the perfect companion. It is not necessary to shut my eyes to describe her. She must be exquisite, of course, but without the trivial emphasis that merely smart women lay on the small fashions of the moment. Her beauty should wear a certain gravity, for does she not understand much and forgive everything, particularly the greed and the follies of men? She must be wise, naturally, but not too wise never to make a mistake, never to take a risk, never to sigh for romance, never to hurt herself. She will always do her utmost not to hurt anybody else, and at all difficult times she will take refuge in laughing at herself, for above everything she is gifted with the good manners of the heart."

"Dear me," she said, "I never knew that the dreams of men were so informed by kindness. Your reputation, Prince Rudolf, scarcely prepares a listener for such sentiments."

"Madam, in your company I had permitted myself for one moment to forget all but the little that is best in me. But now that you have reminded me of my ordinary self I must admit that I should like nothing so much as to kiss you and damn the consequences."

"That rebuke," she said, "was well deserved. For no one could have been more polite than you. You have not yet asked me how I knew you, where we are going, or who I am. I recognized you from your photographs. I followed you from the restaurant where you dined. We are going to my

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house, which is here in Belgrave Square. My name is no matter. And I am going to ask you, sir, to do me a service. You see, I make no excuses. My behavior is too outrageous for excuses to have any value. If you wish, you may say good night now, my car will take you home, and I shall be the richer for having enjoyed an instructive conversation with a man of the world."

Undeterred by her gravity, Rudolf laughed outright. For many months he had not felt so light-hearted.

"Miss X," said he, "it was you who spoke of my reputation. So, if you think you can get rid of me so easily, you're crazy."

Her level eyes searched his face. He was sobered by the profound contempt that seemed to add a dark light to their dark brilliance. He would have noticed this contempt before had he not been so engaged, as was his way, in trying to make an impression on a beautiful woman.

"You are afraid of nothing, Prince Rudolf?"

They were on the pavement now, before the house, and he glanced at the dark imposing building.

"Of a great many things," he said, "but of no possible hurt that could come to me from you."

"Perhaps," she said, "you are wrong there."

An elderly manservant let them in. Rudolf, divesting himself of his overcoat in the large hall, had time to realize the substantial wealth of his surroundings. From above the great fireplace, in which the ashes of a log fire glowed dimly, one of Van Dyck's cavaliers thoughtfully measured the world, while on another wall was the dark and sour visage of a Rembrandt.

Then he was shown into a long paneled library. It was dimly lit, and in front of the fireplace at the far end stood the strange lady and a tall, fair, red-complexioned bull of a man of about his own age.

"This is my brother," said the lady, "Mr. Geraldine. I am Iris Geraldine."

Mr. Geraldine's brick-red complexion sharpened by contrast the paleness of his cold blue eyes. He made no attempt to conceal the hostility with which he measured the faintly smiling face of his guest.

"So now you realize," he said, "why I told my sister not to give you her name, for had you known it you certainly would not have come."

"You misjudge me, Mr. Geraldine. For the sake of a woman like your sister I should willingly risk much more than a disagreeable encounter with a man like her brother. Now what is it you want with me?"

"Surely, Prince Rudolf, you can easily guess what I ——"

"Wait," said Rudolf sharply. "Before we go any further you will be so good as to ask me to sit down. I thank you. Then you will invite me to have a drink. Thank you. I prefer brandy."

Mr. Geraldine's handsome brick-red face broke into a fighting grin. You could see at once that he had good hands with a horse, that dogs

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would come to his whistle, and that he could both give and take a kick in the pants.

"Iris," he turned to his sister, "perhaps you had better leave Prince Rudolf and me together."

Miss Geraldine had not yet glanced at her kidnaped guest. She sat, somewhat stiffly, in a high Queen Anne chair, her eyes lost in the leaping colors of the bright fire.

"I am here," said Prince Rudolf, "at Miss Geraldine's express invitation, and I am enjoying her company very much. I hope you will stay with us, Miss Geraldine. No doubt your brother is a splendid fellow, but he is not half so pretty to look at as you are."

She held her small head very still and erect, and he was conscious that she would much prefer to ignore his presence. She spoke to the fire, in her low cool voice, as though she was thinking out loud.

"I do not like," she said, "to see any man humiliated, no matter how much he may deserve it."

"I'll risk that," said Rudolf. "Go ahead, Mr. Geraldine. As you said, I know you are the chairman of the great and famous private bank of Geraldine Brothers, and that you are the trustee of the estate of Miss Carstairs."

"Not only her trustee, Prince, but also her late father's most intimate friend. She told me no later than this afternoon that she had made up her mind to marry you."

"She ought to have told me first," said Prince Rudolf, "but her decision makes me so happy that I must forgive her. Thank you for your congratulations, Mr. Geraldine."

"Hers is a great fortune," said Mr. Geraldine dryly.

"So my father has told me every day for weeks. He will be very pleased about this, as he has been so hard up lately. How agreeable it is to meet nice young girls like Miss Carstairs who think nothing of bringing a little sunshine into the lives of tired old men like my father. When I tell him tomorrow, he will be very touched."

"He won't," Mr. Geraldine said, "because you won't."

Prince Rudolf's attention appeared at that moment to be engaged in an exhaustive study of Iris Geraldine's profile, and that he thought very highly of it was obvious from his expression.

"I won't . . . what?" he said absently.

"You won't tell your father you are going to marry Miss Carstairs, Prince, because you are not going to."

"All complaints on that head," said Rudolf, "should be addressed to Miss Carstairs in person. It is her life. It is her money. It is to be her marriage. And I am her choice."

"A girl so young," said Mr. Geraldine, "does not always know what is best for her. I cannot forbid Baba to marry you, because she is of age. I can't persuade her not to by telling her that you, in spite of your great name, are a well-known waster and adventurer, that you are notorious

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both for your affairs with women and for your dexterity in getting your bills paid, because she dismisses all such facts as reflections on a misunderstood, handsome, and romantic prince."

"And quite right too. That ought to teach you, Mr. Geraldine, not to go about putting nasty thoughts into young girls' heads. Just because nobody has ever thought you romantic since you were a little boy in velvet pants, why be jealous of me?"

"I am never jealous," said Mr. Geraldine, "of a crook."

"Am I to understand, Mr. Geraldine, that you have just called me a crook?"

"You are. I have."

"In that case," said Prince Rudolf, rising from his chair, "I must have another brandy. You have interested me greatly, Mr. Geraldine. Won't you please develop your theory?"

"It is not a theory, Prince, but a fact. But I had much rather not elaborate it — and I won't, if you promise not to see Miss Carstairs again."

"But that would never do, Mr. Geraldine. The poor girl would be very upset. My poor father would be very disappointed. And my poor creditors would be very angry."

"Very well," said Mr. Geraldine grimly. "On the formal announcement of your engagement to Miss Carstairs I shall notify the proper authorities that I have in my possession a check drawn in your favor by a Mr. John Anderson and cashed by you, which I have every reason to suspect is a forgery."

"But why suspect?" said Prince Rudolf. "You know it's a forgery."

"So you admit forging Anderson's signature to a check for £1,000?"

Prince Rudolf glanced aside at Iris Geraldine — and instantly found, to his surprise and consternation, that something inside him was beating painfully. He could not immediately put this curious phenomenon down to a disturbance of his heart-action, since he had for some years regarded his heart as a leathery veteran, dingily and immovably fixed within a dark cloud of cigarette smoke. But he was a reasonable man and had to face the fact that here the old veteran was, thumping like a boy's just because a fair young woman with level eyes was regarding him gravely and impersonally, as a scientist might regard a maggot.

"Mr. Geraldine," he said at last, and his voice for the first time was without any mockery at all, "when John Anderson died last week, did you not, as his executor, find any note among his papers referring to me?"

"I did not."

"I think you did. I think you have that note in your possession. John Anderson was a gambler, and like nearly all gamblers he was a very honest man. Do you still say that he left no letter in his handwriting with reference to me?"

"I have already said so, Prince Rudolf."

"Then I should like to put it on record, Mr. Geraldine, that you are a

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liar. This may be due to the fact that you were badly brought up, but the fact remains that you are a liar. A year ago John Anderson bet me a hundred pounds that I could not forge his signature and get away with it without suspicion. It was to be for a check of a thousand pounds merely so that the signature should be scrutinized carefully at the bank. I succeeded, returned the thousand pounds in cash to Anderson, who gave me the bet I had won and also a receipt for the sum of the forged check. I have that receipt. Among his papers you have already found a letter signed by him telling the circumstances of the forged check."

"Prince Rudolf," said Mr. Geraldine, "of course I am very glad that you have John Anderson's receipt. When you come to be examined by the police on the matter of Anderson's forged signature that receipt will no doubt form the pivot of your defense. It might even win you acquittal, and probably will, but in the absence of any letter from John Anderson among his effects exonerating you of all blame, I am afraid that a great deal of doubt will exist in the public mind as to whether you are, or are not, a common swindler. I have not yet found that letter among Anderson's effects. If and when I do, I shall of course be delighted to let you know."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Geraldine. In return I can only say that if I was a cannibal I should simply have to drown you in Worcester sauce before being able to eat you. So I am to understand that unless I give up Miss Carstairs you will make it very unpleasant indeed for me?"

"I prefer to say, Prince, that unless you agree to give up this misguided girl, I shall have to do my best to show her what sort of a man you really are. As you know, by her father's will she comes into her estate on the day she marries. And she told me today that it was her fixed intention, as she is very rich and you are poor, to settle on you a very considerable sum of money which would ensure you a comfortable income for life."

"I wish," sighed Rudolf, "that my father could hear you say that. His enthusiasm would be quite touching."

"I fear he will be disappointed, Prince. But not to depress you both too much, and since after all you are being forced to give up a considerable fortune, I am prepared here and now to write you a check for £4,000. I shall send it to you on the day that Miss Carstairs tells me that she has decided not to marry you."

"Dear me," said Rudolf, "I see that I must have another brandy. Thank you, Mr. Geraldine. Your brandy is superb. Did you say four thousand pounds?"

"I did — merely, you understand, as a small consolation ——"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow — it's a big consolation. After all, are there many men whose charms could be valued at four thousand pounds? I fear you are a flatterer, Mr. Geraldine."

The banker's handsome red face

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was, for a man making a contemptuous offer, curiously eager, and Rudolf regarded him thoughtfully.

"Then you accept, Prince? You will agree to leave Miss Carstairs alone?"

But Rudolf's attention appeared now to be engaged in yet another careful examination of Miss Geraldine's cold profile.

"I note with regret," he said, "that Miss Geraldine's disapproval of me has increased to such an extent that, were she not a lady, she would express it in such old-fashioned terms as swindler, gigolo, and cad."

"Cad," said Iris Geraldine, "is an unpleasant word. But very descriptive. I should prefer you, Prince, to address yourself only to my brother. I am here merely as a witness to a business arrangement."

"Not at all," said Rudolf, with sudden sharpness. "It is a romantic arrangement."

Astonished, they stared at him. He was smiling in his saturnine way. Mr. Geraldine glanced at his sister, and laughed. It was the kind of laugh for which a small chap would have been knocked down, but he was a bull of a man.

"These fellows," said he, "can make anything seem romantic."

"What fellows, Mr. Geraldine?"

"Romantic fellows, Prince — romantic wasters."

"Well, I can promise you that your sister will find what I am going to say a good deal more romantic than you will. I am going to tell you a story."

"Not to me," said Miss Geraldine with spirit. "I am going to bed."

"This story, Miss Geraldine," said Rudolf slowly, "is about your sister."

They stared at him across an appalled silence. But his dark eyes saw only Iris Geraldine's still white face, at last turned full to his.

"You knew her?" she sighed.

"But for her," said Prince Rudolf, "I should not be here tonight."

"Fantastic nonsense!" said Geraldine harshly. "Diana died more than ten years ago."

"Ten years, three months and five days ago, my friend. I came into your car, Miss Geraldine, only because I recognized the faint scent you are wearing. It is made by an obscure perfumer in Paris, and I gave her first bottle to Diana. Then for sentimental reasons I paid my friend Louvois, the perfumer, enough money to buy the rights of the scent outright — that is, so that no one but Diana Geraldine should ever use it. I was a rich man then, you understand. Louvois, for as long as he was in business, was to send her one bottle every six months at this address.

"A year or so after she was killed in that motor accident near Fontainbleau, Louvois wrote to me enclosing a letter that he had received from England. The letter was from a girls' school near Ascot, and was written by a schoolgirl to the effect that the duty-paid scent from Paris which had been delivered to Miss Geraldine was obviously for her elder sister, who was dead, but could it please go on being

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sent to the address in Belgrave Square so that she could use it when she was grown up in memory of her dear sister, and it was signed 'Iris Geraldine.'

"So you will see why I so willingly came with you when you invited me, I told you, didn't I, that you weren't a stranger?"

"Diana," said Iris Geraldine, so dimly that she was scarcely audible, "was the loveliest elder sister a little girl could have. I was fourteen when she died, and as our father and mother had died so long before, she was everything in the world — all heroines in one — to me. And so I clung to the sweet dry perfume which, so she once told her little sister, a fairytale prince had given her to use forever and ever."

"Well," said Mr. Geraldine bitterly, "there's damn little of the fairytale about the Prince now."

Rudolf smiled. "That's true enough, dear me. But you must remember I was only twenty-three then — and Diana was twenty. Young people, Mr. Geraldine, are sometimes very serious indeed about such trivialities as being in love."

"Now that you have hurt Iris," said her brother harshly, "by bringing up memories of her sister, may I ask what was your point in doing so?"

"He has not hurt me," said Iris. Her eyes were hidden. Her voice came from behind an invisible curtain. "You didn't intend to, did you, Prince?"

"Indirectly, my dear, I fear I must — that is, through this brother of yours. Mr. Geraldine, I told you about Diana because she used to speak of you, her elder brother and the head of the family. You will no doubt already have remarked that I don't like you. This is not due wholly to your manner, which would make an unfavorable impression even on a drunken sailor. It is because Diana did not like you, as you of course know.

"That you are a bully goes without saying. But being a bully is not a crime — indeed it is sometimes an asset. One moment, Mr. Geraldine. I know also that in spite of your very respectable front as a great banker, you are an unscrupulous speculator. Diana — aged twenty to your twenty-five — guessed your true character.

"Now I am going to make the deduction that as Miss Carstairs's trustee you have gambled with part of her funds and that in the recent Wall Street crash you have lost heavily. Wait. On her marriage you will have to show her accounts to her lawyers, with the result that you will find yourself in the dock. That is why you do not want her to marry until you can regain your losses.

"This is all guesswork, you will say, and no doubt you will tell me I am wrong. But on one point I can ease your mind. I am not going to marry Miss Carstairs.

"That is not because I wish to save you, but because I have fallen in love tonight for the second time in my life, though I fear the lady does not approve of me at all. I can only hope

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to win her approval in time.

"But that is another story. Tomorrow I shall advise Miss Carstairs to ask her lawyers to look into ——"

Mr. Geraldine chewed his cigar. His cold eyes were thoughtful, but there was a grin on his handsome red face. This grin had no doubt been put there by an ancestor who had been caught red-handed while committing robbery under arms and had known that the game was over.

"Iris," he said, "somebody ought to have warned me about the intelligence of princes. I begin to see now how even the shrewdest bankers have been persuaded to lend them money."

"My father, Mr. Geraldine, who has had more than sixty years' experience of owing money to the shrewdest bankers in London and New York, says that times are not what they were."

Mr. Geraldine smiled across at him. His eyes were cold and watchful. "Prince Rudolf, I shall not like standing in the dock charged with having misappropriated my client's funds."

Rudolf nodded sympathetically. "Nor should I. Taking other people's money is nice work, if you can get away with it. Given a bad character — like yours and my father's — it's all a matter of luck."

"Then I am sorry that you are not your father, Prince. If you were, I should offer you £10,000 at the end of six months merely for keeping your mouth shut during that time. But as you are not, I fear I shall have to do something drastic, like shooting myself. But I don't like the idea at all."

Rudolf nodded sympathetically. "Yes, there is a degree of emphasis about suicide which is always disagreeable to a thoughtful mind. I shouldn't commit suicide, Mr. Geraldine. It will probably embarrass more people than it will please."

"But, my dear Prince, what else can I do? Miss Carstairs has never liked me, anyway. And when tomorrow you tell her of your suspicions, she will be only too eager to consult her lawyers."

Rudolf turned to Miss Geraldine. "What do you think of all this, Iris?"

"I think," she said very gravely, "that my brother has been playing with fire for a long time and that he has at last burned his hands. I think that tonight will mark a change for the better in him."

"Then you don't think he will shoot himself?"

She smiled unsteadily. "You are a pair of cruel babies, aren't you?"

"Mr. Geraldine," said Rudolf, "did you hear that? You are a cruel baby."

"You too," said Mr. Geraldine. "Have another brandy."

"Thank you. Then, Iris, you think I ought not to tell Miss Carstairs?"

"I can promise you," said Geraldine, "that her capital will be intact within six months. Also many innocent people will suffer loss if this comes to a head now. Later on, they won't."

"But I am lunching with the girl tomorrow," said Prince Rudolf, "and

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I might possibly blurt out something."

"You can put off the lunch," said Iris coldly.

"But I hate lunching alone, Iris. Here is an idea. Will you lunch with me?"

"I am already engaged."

Rudolf turned to Geraldine. "There you are, my friend. I've done my best. She doesn't like me. She won't lunch with me. I fear you will have to commit suicide, after all."

"Nonsense, Iris," said her brother. "Of course you can lunch with him."

"But I don't want to," said Iris.

"She doesn't like me," said Rudolf helplessly. "Give it up, Geraldine."

"I do like you," said Iris stormily. "It's only that you talk such nonsense so plausibly that I daren't trust myself alone with you."

"That's splendid," said Rudolf. "Unfortunately, we shall be lunching in a public place, and I shan't be able to do very much."

"But you can always talk," said Iris.

"I shall. I shall propose marriage."

"I shall refuse."

"Naturally. Then I shall point out that you lack foresight. For if you had foresight you would know that it is sheer waste of time to go on refusing a man whom you are going to accept in the end."

"Very well," said Iris, "I lack foresight."

"Mr. Geraldine," said Prince Rudolf, "we have been forgetting my father. Some time ago you called me a crook ——"

"That was politics, Prince. Anderson had told me the real story."

"Politics cost money, Mr. Geraldine. In payment for your politics you will be so good as to earn my father's undying gratitude by sending him tomorrow the sum of £4,000 in notes from an Anonymous Admirer. This gift will give him great pleasure both financially and morally, since he has never had any admirers, anonymous or otherwise. Good night, Mr. Geraldine. Your servant, Iris. I shall call for you at one tomorrow."

The two men shook hands. This was a quiet and thoughtful ceremony, which they appeared to enjoy.

Iris, with a sudden high color, walked to the door and out into the hall. Prince Rudolf found her there, and she walked with him towards the front hall. Very lightly she touched his arm.

"Thank you for not ruining my brother. That was because of Diana?"

"Because of Diana and Iris," he said. "Because of enchantment and gentleness. Because I am a lucky man to have found out tonight that, even in this world, they never die."

He stooped to kiss her hand, and as he did so a flutter of lips just touched his forehead.

"Dear me," she whispered, "who would have thought you were such a darling!"

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DOUBLE PLAY

by COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

White-haired Chief Speare listened, tense, eyes narrowed, as Jim Edwards, head of the homicide squad, made his report. At last he said: "Sorry, Jim, but that's not the fellow I'm going to hang this crime on."

Jim Edwards gasped.

"Who else could have done it but Bo Davis? He worked for this family; knew where they kept their money and was the only person — get this now — the only person who had a key to the garden tool shed where the murder weapon came from. I've placed him near the house about the time of the murder. He was known to be broke yesterday; today he's got money and spending it in taverns. I figure to check a few more routine angles and the guy's as good as in the electric chair."

The chief replied grimly: "Stick to the Bo Davis trail if you want to. But I'm going to hang this murder on Boston Charlie."

"On Boston Charlie?" The homicide head stared in amazement. "Boston Charlie couldn't have pulled this. It isn't his kind of a job. He's never killed anybody, and never will."

"You've just heard him accused of murder, haven't you?"

"But, Chief," the homicide head was arguing desperately, "you're dead wrong. Besides, we'd have to catch Boston Charlie before we could prove a case. And we can't catch him. We've been trying to find him for eight months," he added ruefully, "and there isn't a copper on the force who can even guess at where he's hiding out."

The chief growled: "Listen, Boston Charlie got out of Ralsing Prison eight months ago. Before he was freed, he bragged to a cellmate that he had two hide-outs in this town where nobody could find him. Told the cellmate that with a line-up like that he could get away with murder —"

"But that's just an expression, a piece of slang!" Jim Edwards shouted it in his exasperation. "Boston Charlie couldn't have pulled this job."

"Why not?"

"Because Bo Davis did it and I can prove it."

"Well, my theory —"

"Whatever it is, it's wrong. Chief, it'll make a joke out of this department. Ruin us. The papers are already riding us hard enough because we can't find Boston Charlie for those other jobs. What will happen if we try to hang this triple murder on him? They'll burn us up!"

"I've thought about that. But the statement stands."

Jim Edwards turned wearily away, only to return.

"Chief," he begged, "I know you've made some swell stabs in the

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dark. But on this you're plain whacky. Look at it from a common-sense angle. Boston Charlie is probably only paying twenty-five or thirty bucks a day for his hideout; after all, it only means three months in jail for covering a guy like him. But murder's different, and everybody in the underworld knows it's ten years in this state for anybody who harbors a known murderer. What happens? Instead of a reasonable fee, Boston Charlie would find himself charged a hundred and fifty — two hundred smackers a day, maybe more. Does it add up that Boston Charlie, who's accustomed to making big dough in well-cased hauls, would deliberately do something that's going to cost him dough by the bale? Especially when this murder only netted about six hundred dollars? I'm asking you? Does it add up?"

The chief swung about in his big chair.

"Think I want to tip off a sure bet like Bo Davis, so he can run away from me?" he asked. Then, in a final appeal: "Chief, ask any of Boston Charlie's cellmates at Ralsing and they'll tell you that it's almost a mania with Charlie never to do anything that would even put him in the shadow of the condemned cell. Don't take my word for it; ask 'em!"

"Yeah?" the chief turned to a mass of routine papers. "I'm not interested in cellmates."

"And besides, you can't find him!"

"I heard you say that before," snapped the chief. "We can't find him." Then: "Call in about three o'clock."

"Okay." The homicide head said it without enthusiasm as he opened the door, there to stare at the group of reporters and cameramen who clustered the hallway. Hastily he waved them aside. "No statement!" he insisted. "You'll have to see the chief."

Soon they were thick about the chief's desk. Slowly he eyed them. "Gentlemen," he said, "I do not intend to amplify the statement I am about to make. I am going to hang this triple murder on a man you've heard of before — his name is Boston Charlie."

Out of the tangled rush as newsmen ran for pressroom telephones the chief remembered one taunting sentence, flung by a hurrying reporter: "If you can find him!"

The gibe pounded through the officer's head in a hated refrain as an hour, two hours, passed. An officer entered, placing the afternoon papers on the chief's desk. Speare whirled to them. First page after first page — all presented a sequence of criticism. Feeble, impotent police had failed in their efforts to apprehend a man in lesser crimes, so now he had turned to fiendish murder! The chief's eyes caught the stabbing words of a front-page editorial. It called for his resignation.

Slowly he forced himself to read it. He turned to the inside pages of other papers and found other opinions, all derogatory. One hinted at corruption.

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All carried the plaint: "If the police had caught this man for his other crimes, the city would not now have a slaughtering, blood-crazed Public Enemy Number One —"

The chief began to pace the floor. Ten minutes went by, twenty. Suddenly he whirled to the ringing of the telephone. A voice said: "Don't try to trace this call, Chief, or I'll hang up."

"You're safe. Go ahead and talk."

"Okay. About a certain guy, I've just seen him; done a favor for him now and then. He's about to get kicked out of his cover joint."

"Yeah? Why?"

"Double-crossed his landlord. Promised he'd never pull anything raw — and look at tonight's papers. He says I've got to take him in — so I promise; stallin', Chief, long enough to get to a phone. I ain't riskin' ten years, no matter how much he denies it. Got a pencil?"

"Yes — go ahead." The chief wrote hurriedly. Then he hung up the telephone for the communicating system. The gleam of the hunt was in his eyes as he snapped commands: "Notify detective department to provide officers for immediate raid at 1857 Despaines Street. Have prowl cars 18, 65, 87 and 36 proceed in readiness to support raid when we need them. Everyone to use extreme vigilance. It's Boston Charlie!"

"Yes, sir!" came the excited answer. "When do we move in on him?"

"When I get there. This is one mug I put the rings on myself!"

Jerking open a drawer of his desk, he pawed with one hand for handcuffs and service revolver as with the other he lifted the receiver of the insistent telephone.

"Chief Speare speaking!" Then he grinned. "Oh, you, Edwards? Just in time. Pick up Bo Davis any time you feel like it. Yeh, I said Bo Davis — for that triple murder."

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MISTRESS OF MANHUNTING

It was Howard Haycraft who called Mary Roberts Rinehart "the unquestioned dean of crime writing by and for women," and it was Mr. Haycraft too who warned that while Mrs. Rinehart is usually thought of as a "woman's author," numerous men read her stories avidly and without apology. All of which is true: Mary Roberts Rinehart, author of THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE, MISS PINKERTON, THE ALBUM, *and many other books including the hilarious ones about that intrepid spinster who so enlivens the pages of "The Saturday Evening Post," the one and only Tish, is the grand lady of the American detective story, our senior Mistress of Manhunting . . . Perhaps you failed to read an interesting anecdote about Mary Roberts Rinehart in the June 30, 1947 issue of "Time": it told how Mrs. Rinehart, at the age of seventy, participated in a crime situation which she herself might have imagined. The scene occurred in the library of Mrs. Rinehart's 24-room mansion in fashionable Bar Harbor — before the house was burned to the ground in the recent holocaust of forest fires that swept through Maine. Mrs. Rinehart's chef, who had been in her employ a quarter of a century, entered the library coatless and wild-eyed.*

"Where is your coat?" asked Mrs. Rinehart.

"Here it is," replied the chef, and produced a gun from his hip pocket. The chef aimed the gun at Mrs. Rinehart and pulled the trigger. Fortunately, the gun misfired, but at the sound of the ominous click Mrs. Rinehart screamed, ran for the butler's pantry, and grabbed the telephone extension. The chef followed, still shooting, and still misfiring. Mrs. Rinehart stood there petrified — like one of her own heroines — until the chauffeur rushed in, grappled with the chef, and disarmed him. Eventually the police arrived, and that night, in his jail cell, the chef hanged himself. To this day no one, including Mrs. Rinehart herself, has been able to figure out a motive for the attack. But you can bet all the clues in Detective Town that the next time Mary Roberts Rinehart describes such a scene, it will be in terms of stark and utterly convincing realism.

Mrs. Rinehart is generally acknowledged as the founder of the so-called "Had-I-But-Known School." Also, to quote Mr. Haycraft again, she represents "the quintessence of the romantic mood" in the literature of detection. But the story we bring you is not an example of the Mary Roberts Rinehart "formula": rather, it is a tale which illustrates the intensely realistic quality of Mary Roberts Rinehart's more unconventional work — a tale of a man with animal instincts and a dog with human instincts, a tale of psychological warfare between a man and a dog.

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THE DOG IN THE ORCHARD

by MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

THE MAN was sitting on the porch of the farmhouse. He sat very still, a rifle across his knee, his eyes fixed on the orchard and the wheat field beyond it.

The day had been hot. For hours he had watched the heat rising in shimmering waves from the dirt road that led into the farm. Now, however, it was cooler. A slight breeze ruffled the dust which lay thick everywhere, and moving carefully, he got out a bandanna handkerchief and dried his face.

In the wheat field beyond the orchard the dog raised his head with equal caution. He was panting heavily. He wanted water badly, but his eyes were on the figure on the porch. He knew now that it was dangerous to go to the creek or the horse trough. There was a nick out of one ear where a bullet had just touched him, and flies buzzed around it constantly. He could wait until dark. With the patience of his kind, he closed his eyes and slept.

It was twilight when he got to his feet. He had heard the slam of the screen door, and he knew what that meant. But even then he was wary. He stood, his eyes fixed on the house. So he remained for some time. Then at last, crouching low, he moved to the creek and drank. Thus revealed, he was gaunt to the point of starvation, his coat drab and dry. He was still drinking when he heard the car. He stood tense; then, abandoning all caution, he loped eagerly toward it, and the man inside saw him.

"Hello, Rags," he called. "How are you?"

But the dog shrank back at the sound of his voice, and as he retreated, the man looked after him curiously. Looks half starved, he thought. Queer. I always thought Nellie was crazy about him.

He stopped the car in front of the house and got out. There was a lighted lamp inside, and someone was moving about. He got out and clumped up the steps.

"Hi, Foster!" he called. "Got a minute or two?"

There was a silence. Then the man came to the door. He looked uneasy. "I'm getting my supper," he said. "What's wrong, sheriff?"

"Nothing wrong. Just mending my political fences. Election soon."

"Well, I'm for you. You know that."

He moved aside unwillingly, and the sheriff came in. He knew the house well. It was the usual farmhouse of the district, and Nellie Foster kept it immaculate. It was untidy now, however. The kitchen sink was piled with dishes.

The sheriff looked surprised. "Nel-

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lie sick?" he asked.

"Nope. Gone to her mother's."

"Where's that?"

"Indiana," said Foster. "Old lady's not well. She's been gone a week now."

"Looks like it's time she came back," said the sheriff, grinning. "That dog of hers looks it, too. Why don't you feed him once in a while?"

Foster was working at the stove. He was a big man, handsome after a fashion, but now slovenly and unkempt. He kept his back to the sheriff.

"Damn thing won't come near me," he said. "I kicked him once, and he didn't like it. Anyhow, he was her dog, not mine." He added grudgingly, "How about supper? I'm going to fry some eggs."

"Fine. I'll wash first."

The sheriff went out onto the back porch. There was a tin basin there, a pail of water and a ladle. He poured out some water and washed, drying his hands on a dirty roller towel and glancing about him as he did so. Certainly the place needed Nellie, with her active body and cheerful face. But he remembered that lately she had not been so cheerful, and that there had been some talk about Foster and the Burford girl on the next farm — a plump and brazen creature with an eye out for a man. Any man.

He shrugged that off. Foster was a solid citizen, a successful farmer. He had his feet on the ground, all right.

Nevertheless, the sheriff watched Foster surreptitiously as he moved around the kitchen. He might fall for a girl. He wasn't old. Not over forty; and the Burford girl had a way with her.

While Foster fried the eggs, the sheriff poured his own coffee. Sitting at the table waiting, he saw the rifle in a corner and eyed it with surprise.

"What's the gun for?" he asked. "Didn't know you had one."

"Bought it a year or two back," said Foster. "Weasels got after the chickens."

The two men ate companionably enough. Mostly the sheriff talked. It was in the middle of an anecdote that the dog barked in the orchard — a bark that ended in a long blood-curdling wail. Foster stiffened, and the sheriff saw it.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Is that Rags?"

"Yep. He does it now and then. Someday I'll shoot him if he keeps it up. Damned nuisance."

"Better not do that. He's Nellie's dog. She'd have a fit."

But the sound continued. Out in the orchard the dog was standing, his long tragic face pointed to the sky. But he was weak from hunger, and gradually the sounds died away. He lay down on the ground, and inside the house the sheriff watched the sweat gather on the backs of Foster's hands.

"How long's that been going on?" he asked. "It doesn't sound like Rags. He was a quiet dog."

Foster rose and picked up the plates. "Since Nellie left, mostly. He

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misses her, I guess. Want some more coffee?"

"No, thanks. I'd better be moving."

But the sheriff was thoughtful as he drove back to town, and as he got ready for bed that night he spoke to his wife.

"Saw Foster this evening," he said. "He says Nellie's gone to visit her mother."

"Then that's why she wasn't at church last Sunday. I wondered."

"Where is the mother?" he asked. "What part of the country?"

"Indiana, I think. Why?"

Well, that was all right. He was probably only making a fool of himself. He finished undressing, went to bed and to sleep.

Out at the farm, however, there was no sleep. The dog saw to that. He stood in the orchard and bayed his grief and loneliness to the sky. At last, in a frenzy, Foster picked up the gun and went after him. It was hopeless, of course. The dog was not there, and with an oath the man went back to the house, to lie awake waiting for the sound once more.

In the past week it had been like that, as though it were a game between the two, man and dog; the dog winning at night; the man winning by day. But the advantage lay with the dog. At intervals he slept. The man could not, and he was desperate for sleep. He would doze on the porch, his rifle across his knees, waking with a jerk to find his body bathed in sweat and the gun on the floor.

He did not work on the day following the sheriff's visit, and that night after dark he met the Burford girl out by the barn. She was a big girl, handsome and frankly lustful. She put her arms around him, but he was unresponsive.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I couldn't meet you last night. The sheriff was here."

She eyed him. "The sheriff? What did he want?"

"Nothing much. Election's coming soon. But he heard that damned dog."

"Why don't you poison him? I've said all along he'd make trouble."

"He's too smart for that. I've tried it. He won't eat around the place. Anyhow the sheriff saw him. He might ask questions. Well, let's forget it." He pulled her to him and kissed her roughly. "Listen," he said. "I'm going to sell this place and get out. You'll come along, won't you?"

"Sure." But there was no conviction in her voice, and he pushed her away.

"You'll come, all right," he told her grimly.

It rained the next two days. The dog lay in the field and shivered. And on the third day the sheriff went into the store which was the local post office. He asked for his mail and chatted with the postmistress.

"Hear Nellie Foster's gone away," he said idly. "Out to Indiana."

"That so? When did she go?"

"A week or so ago. Don't tell me Nellie hasn't written to Foster!"

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"I don't remember any mail for him. I don't think he's been in this week."

"He can't be very anxious about her."

"He's pretty anxious about that girl of Burford's. It beats me how a man with a wife will let a girl like that make a fool of him."

"You sound pretty sure."

"I am sure. I've seen them together."

That day the sheriff had a talk with his deputy. "Maybe I'm crazy, Joe; maybe I'm not. I just don't like it. Nellie was a homekeeping woman, and a trip to Indiana would mean something to her. What does she do? She doesn't call up anybody and say she's going. She just goes. It isn't natural."

"Sure sounds queer," said the deputy.

"I think Nellie's dog knows something. And it's my guess that Foster's out to kill him. He's got a gun. It might be a good idea to go out there and look around, anyhow."

They went out through the rain that afternoon. The roads after they left the state highway were muddy, and Foster was evidently not expecting company. As they turned in at his lane he was on the porch, and he had the rifle to his shoulder. He fired before he saw them.

"For God's sake," said the deputy, "what's he doing?"

Then Foster saw them, and his face went blank. He put down the gun and waited for them.

"What's the idea?" asked the sheriff, as he stopped the car. "Getting ready to go to war?"

"There's no law against my shooting rabbits, is there?"

"Weasels and rabbits. You seem to have a lot of varmints around here, Foster."

The sheriff got out of the car, and the deputy followed. They climbed the steps, while Foster watched them with suspicious, bloodshot eyes. He had not shaved, and he had been drinking. Not much. He was still wary.

"What do you fellows want?" he demanded.

"Well, I've got an errand, if you're agreeable. I told my wife about Rag's missing Nellie, and she said she'd like to keep him for a while."

Foster shrugged. "You can have him if you can catch him. He's gone plumb wild. Most ornery dog I ever saw. Won't even eat."

"Where is he?"

"He lies down in the wheat field a lot."

"Well, I'll try," said the sheriff. He turned to go, then stopped. "Better get a license for that gun, Foster. You might get into trouble."

They left him there, gazing after them. Let them get the dog if they could. He needed sleep. All he asked was a chance to sleep. He rubbed his bloodshot eyes and sat down heavily . . .

The two men moved toward the wheat field. Now and then the sheriff whistled and called, but there was no

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response. The dog had learned strategy. He was crawling away on his belly, his head low, following the furrow so that no ripple of the grain betrayed him. Finally he reached a culvert under the road and lay there, shivering in the water.

The sheriff also knew strategy. He spoke cautiously to the deputy. "Take a good look around, Joe," he said. "Go over to the orchard and whistle. That's where the dog howled from. And look at the ground. See if it's been disturbed any. I'll go on to the field."

He called again, "Here, Rags. Good dog. Come on, Rags."

But the dog lay under the culvert, motionless. He was still there when the two men drove back to town.

The deputy was talkative. "I didn't see anything," he said. "But there's something up. The place looks like Foster hasn't done a lick of work on it for a week. What is it, anyhow? Mrs. Foster have insurance?"

"He couldn't collect without a body. That girl of Burford's, most likely. They've been seen together."

"What about the dog? Did you want him?"

"I had an idea he could tell me a thing or two if I could get him. Unless Foster gets him first."

The sheriff dropped Joe in town and drove forty miles to the railroad junction. Here he questioned the men in the ticket office and around the station, but without result. A ticket for a woman going to Indiana. Well, where in Indiana? The sheriff didn't know. To ask Foster would make him suspicious, so at last the sheriff drove home, depressed and uneasy.

But Foster was already suspicious. He saw the girl that night and told her about the sheriff's visit. "What's bringing him around?" he said angrily. "He didn't want that dog. Hell, that wife of his wouldn't have a dog on the place."

"So what? Shoot him and bury him."

"The sheriff knows he's here. I can't kill him. Don't be a damned fool."

His tone was rough. Already his feeling for the girl was changing. She both drew him and repelled him. If it hadn't been for her, he would be sleeping at night, able to eat. But he needed comfort that night. He tried to kiss her, but just then they heard the familiar bark ending in a wail. The girl drew back and shuddered.

The next day, in his office, the sheriff spent some time in thought. He had nothing but a vague suspicion. Nellie Foster might be safe enough. But there was that picture of Foster, glaring at the dog with bloodshot eyes over the sights of his gun. There was, too, the entire moral and physical disintegration of the man. Something had caused it. But what?

The sheriff had one line to follow. How had Nellie got the message about her mother? The farm had no telephone, so it had come either by letter or by telegram. He went to the post office once more. There was no telegraph station in the village, and mes-

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sages were telephoned there from the junction.

This time, however, he went in his official capacity. "Just keep this quiet," he said. "Nellie Foster went to Indiana because her mother was sick. Got any idea how she learned that? By letter or telegram?"

The postmistress looked startled. "There's nothing wrong, is there? About Nellie?"

"I don't know. It's a queer business."

"She didn't get a telegram. She might have had a letter. She and her mother wrote pretty steady. There's just one thing — maybe it doesn't mean anything."

"What is it?"

"Foster's trying to sell his farm."

"The hell he is!"

"Matt Saunders has wanted it for a good while. Foster was in to see him today."

The sheriff went away, thoughtful. So Foster was getting out. He didn't like the look of it. Yet when he met Matt Saunders on the street, the matter seemed commonplace enough.

"Hear you're thinking of buying the Foster place, Matt."

"Yeah. Been dickering for it for a couple of years."

"And Foster's selling."

"Looks like it. Nellie wants to be near her mother, somewhere out West."

But the sheriff was still not satisfied. That afternoon he sent for Joe and gave him some instructions.

"Now, mind this," he said. "We're outside the law, and Foster can raise the devil if he sees you. Besides, I have an idea he's dangerous."

"I'll be all right," said Joe.

"If he stays in the house you stay out."

"You bet!" said Joe fervently.

But Foster did not stay in the house that night. At dusk the dog had commenced once more its mournful wail, and when Foster met the girl at the barn he did not even embrace her. He stood off, red-eyed and unkempt, and his voice was hoarse with rage and fear.

"You got me into this," he said brutally. "Now, get me out. Listen to that! There must be some way to get him. He might let a woman get near him."

She nodded. "He might. He might think I was Nellie. See here, get me some of her clothes — things she's worn — and some shoes and stockings. And you'd better bring meat and a rope."

It seemed a sound plan. Foster felt more cheerful as he went back to his house. The weather had cleared, and the moon was out.

He never saw Joe, hidden in Nellie's room, because as Foster started up the stairs, the deputy slid out the window and dropped lightly to the ground. But Foster was beyond fear or suspicion that night. His only thought was the dog. Nevertheless, as he mounted the stairs he was trembling, and in the bedroom, groping in the clothes closet, he made small whimpering noises, strange from his big body.

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But the instinct for self-preservation was strong. He found what he wanted, and went downstairs. The girl was on the porch. She had slipped off most of her clothing, and the moonlight made her flesh gleam white and desirable. But he did not so much as look at her. All at once he hated her white body, and suddenly it occurred to him that she hated him, too; that only one thing united them now, and that was fear.

"Where's the meat?"

"I'll get it."

"Well, hurry, you fool. I can't stay out all night."

She was dressed in Nellie's clothes when he came back, and she took the pan of meat without a word.

The dog was lying in the familiar spot in the orchard. He was very weak. He breathed shallowly, his dull eyes closing, then opening with a jerk. But his ears were alert, and his sensitive nose. It was his nose that told him first. Meat, of course, but something else, too. He staggered to his feet and stood trembling violently. She was coming. She was coming at last. With a low whimper he ran to her.

"All right," called the girl. "I've got him."

He made no protest, save when Foster came near. Then he showed his teeth. Tied and locked in the barn, he wolfed down his food, and afterwards he slept. But there was no hope in him, and once in the night he howled again. Foster, lying awake, heard him and swore.

It was morning when Joe reported to the sheriff. He looked pleased with himself.

"Get in?" asked the sheriff.

Joe nodded. "Looks like the story's straight, all right," he said. "Foster nearly caught me, at that. But I had time to look around. Her clothes are gone, except the stuff she worked in."

The sheriff grunted. "Either the story's straight, or he's smarter than I thought he was."

Joe grinned. "Well, he wasn't so smart, at that," he said. "Look at this."

He held out his hand, and in it was a plain gold wedding ring.

"In the pocket of an apron," he said. "Like she took it off when she was working. Ain't likely a woman would go on a visit and leave a thing like that."

"No," said the sheriff soberly. "No."

Once more he got into his car and drove out to the farm. Already the atmosphere of the place had subtly changed, and so had Foster. He had shaved and put on a fresh shirt, and the porch had been swept. When the sheriff arrived, he was repairing the chicken-yard fence, and he looked himself again.

"Thought I'd make another try for Rags," the sheriff said. "He kinda worries me. That is, unless Nellie's coming back soon."

Foster shrugged. "I don't expect her. Her mother's pretty sick."

"You've heard from her, then?"

"Yeah. Had a letter a day or two

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ago. She won't be back for a while."

"Then I'd better see about the dog."

"Dog's gone," said Foster. "I gave him to that girl of Burford's. She was going to visit some relatives over in Carter County, and she said they'd take him. Left this morning."

The sheriff looked at him. "I think you're lying, Foster," he said. "You haven't heard from Nellie, and you've been trying to kill Rags for a week or more. Why?"

"He was a damned nuisance, that's why!"

"Where's Nellie, Foster?"

"I've told you where she is. You crazy with the heat or what?"

"Where is she? I mean, what town. What part of Indiana?"

Foster looked at the hatchet in his hand, then put it down and straightened. "Now, get this and get it right, sheriff," he said. "I'm having no interference with my affairs. For a man running for re-election, you're making a fool of yourself for nothing. What business is it of yours where my wife is, or my dog either? Now, get the hell out of here. I've got work to do."

The sheriff reflected ruefully on that as he drove back to town. It was true. Nellie might be in Indiana. She might even have forgotten her wedding ring. All he really had was Foster's lie about the letter and a dog howling in the night; and now even the dog was gone . . .

Certainly the dog was gone. Early in the morning the girl had led him out to her car and tied him in the back. But there was no fight left in him. He lay where she placed him, hardly moving through the long hours.

The girl, on the contrary, was cheerful. She felt that she had escaped catastrophe by her own shrewdness. When she thought of Foster, she laughed out of sheer relief.

The dumb fool, she thought. It's the women who have the brains.

She stayed the night at her cousin's farm. The dog stood by while they looked at him, his head drooping, his tail between his legs. When the children fed him he ate, but only once did he show any emotion whatever. That was when the girl was starting back the next morning.

"Well, good-bye, Rags," she said. "Be a good dog, won't you?"

She leaned down to touch him, and he snarled and showed his teeth.

"Gosh!" she said. "I don't believe he likes me."

The dog was quiet enough after she had gone. The children petted him, and he was gentle with them. But he lay most of the time in his kennel, sleeping and eating. Now and then he moved outside, as though to test his legs. The rope which tied him was long. He would walk a bit, go back and sleep again. At the end of three days he looked better: his coat had improved; his eyes were clear. And that night he started to free himself.

It took him a long time, for the rope was tough; but before dawn he was free. He moved out of the kennel, shook himself and started for home.

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Meanwhile, the sheriff had reached an impasse. Nellie had been a reticent woman. His guarded inquiries revealed no one in town who knew where her mother lived. And then one day his case, such as it was, blew up entirely.

Foster received a letter from Indiana.

"It was from Indiana, all right," said the postmistress. "I couldn't make out the town. He didn't give me time to look at it."

"He was here, was he?"

"He was waiting for me to sort the mail. He's been in every morning for three or four days."

"Would you know Nellie's writing?"

"No, but it looked like a woman wrote it."

The sheriff went back to the office and taking out the wedding ring, laid it on his desk. It was still there when the door opened and Foster came in. He looked well, and he was carefully dressed.

"Just thought I'd drop in," he said. "You and I haven't been too friendly, but I guess that was my fault."

"Understand you're getting out."

"Yes. Sold the farm yesterday. I'll be off in a day or two. Nellie likes it where she is. Anyhow, her mother's pretty old."

"Then you've heard from her?"

"Got a letter today."

Foster took it out of its envelope and gave it to the sheriff. It was what might be expected, rather stiff and in a woman's hand, and after the sheriff read it he handed it back.

"She doesn't say anything about her wedding ring, does she?" he asked.

"Her wedding ring? What about it?"

"I had an idea she forgot it."

Foster looked uneasy. "Well, what if she did?" he demanded angrily. "She forgot a lot of things. She always did."

"This look like it? It's got her initials inside."

Foster's face lost its color as he saw the ring. "Where the hell did you get that?" he shouted furiously. "If you've been in my house without a warrant I'll have the law on you."

"I am the law around here," said the sheriff. "At least, until after election. Let's see the envelope of that letter."

But Foster stamped out of the office, and the sheriff was ruefully aware that he had overplayed his hand. When Joe came in, he was pulling on his pipe, the ring still in front of him.

"Foster's had a letter, Joe," he said.

"From his wife?"

"From some woman. Maybe Nellie, maybe not. Ever see the Burford girl's handwriting, Joe?"

Joe blushed. "I had a note or two, 'way back," he admitted.

"Know it again?"

"I may have a letter around somewhere," said Joe uncomfortably.

"I'd like to see it. None of my business what it's about. Think you can find it?"

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"I'll go home and look."

An hour later the sheriff sat with the letter before him and a deep conviction in his mind. The Burford girl had written Foster's letter; it had gone to someone in Indiana in another envelope and been sent back by request. The sheriff had another conviction too: that Nellie Foster was dead and buried somewhere on the farm. But where? He could not dig over a hundred and sixty acres. He probably had no right to dig at all, without more of a case than he had; and Foster was leaving. In a day or two he would be gone.

If only he had the dog! He grunted. The dog was probably dead, too.

But the dog was not dead. He was not only alive — he was on his way home. It was now, although neither knew it, a race between Foster and himself, between dog and man; the man to close up his affairs and escape, the dog to prevent that escape; the man living in terror, the dog living by sheer determination. But the dog had instinct, the man only his wits.

It was a long distance, and the dog was wary. He traveled mostly by night, resting during the day; but his route was as direct as a homing pigeon's. By what miracle he found his way, no one would ever know.

But find it he did. On the night before Foster was to leave, Joe came into the sheriff's office. The sheriff was sitting there, his feet on his desk.

"Well, I'd better be going home," he said. "No use sitting here worrying."

"Nothing doing, eh?"

"Nothing. Maybe I'm getting too old for this job."

Joe made ready to follow him. Then he remembered something. "Say," he said, "if I didn't know that dog of Foster's was a hundred miles from here, I'd say I'd seen him tonight."

"Rags? You saw Rags?"

"Well, I don't know him well. Looked like him, though. He was heading for Foster's place, and he was about all in."

The sheriff reached into the drawer of his desk and took out an automatic. "Maybe I'm crazy with the heat, as Foster says," he observed. "Again, maybe I'm not. But I think that dog was Rags, and if it was, I'm damned sure I know where he was going. Better come along."

They drove out by the country road. It was a moonlit night, and a mile or so this side of Foster's, they overtook the dog. He was moving along, his head and tail drooping, his whole body showing exhaustion. The men got out of the car and followed him on foot. They were only a few yards behind him when he turned into Foster's lane. But he did not go to the house.

He went directly to the orchard, and once more lifted his long tragic face to the sky and sent out his heartbroken cry. The two men listened, their nerves strung taut. The wail ended, the dog began to scratch at the earth. He scratched furiously, and Joe caught the sheriff's arm.

"Do you suppose she's been buried

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there?" he whispered.

"I'm afraid so, poor woman."

The sheriff started toward the house, Joe following him. When they were close by, Foster flung open the door, but he did not see the two men. He stood staring toward the orchard, and as the dog wailed again he made a strange gesture, as of a man defeated. Then he went back into the house and slammed the door. The sheriff leaped for the porch.

He got there just too late. A shot rang out inside, and when they entered, Foster was lying dead on the floor.

Hours later, when Nellie Foster's body had been found in the orchard and taken away, the sheriff climbed wearily into his car. Joe drove, and the sheriff sat back, his eyes closed, while at his feet Rags slept the sleep of exhaustion. They were almost home when he spoke.

"You know, son, it's a funny thing about Foster. He wasn't fighting the law. He thought he had the law beat a mile. What he was fighting was this dog."

"And the dog won," said Joe.

"Yes," said the sheriff. "The dog won."

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IT'S night. You're aboard a yacht. Suddenly... a shot! Then ... "Man Overbo-o-oard!" And you find yourself clutching a woman holding a gun—*from which one shot has been fired!*

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A FIGURE lies on a blood-stained carpet aboard a boat aground in the bay. The tide goes out. The boat keels over. The body rolls over and over, until it slams against the wall!

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